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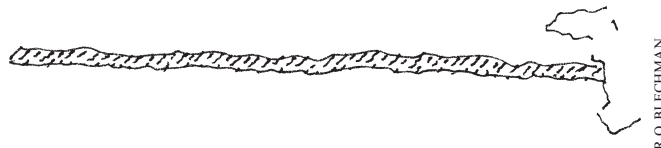
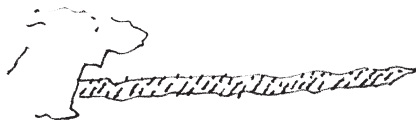
Sicko

**CHRISTOPHER HAYES
ON MICHAEL MOORE**

**AND: ROBERT L. BOROSAGE &
KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL
ON HEALTHCARE & CANDIDATES**
**TRUDY LIEBERMAN
ON MEDICARE**

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LETTERS



WE COVER ISRAEL/PALESTINE

Brookline, Mass.

■ Your coverage in several recent articles, columns and book reviews concerning the state of Israeli-Palestinian relations evokes my gratitude and admiration. It shows probing journalism and moral courage at a time when the AIPAC lobby and its passive supporters in the Jewish-American community continue to treat the Israeli government's policies as a sacred cow and the Palestinian people as subhuman. Despite the inevitable barrage of poison-pen letters you undoubtedly receive, count me as one proud and satisfied "customer" (subscriber).

ABRAM CHIPMAN

New York City

■ Misleading statements fill your June 18 editorial "Endless Occupation." Contrary to the assertion that Israel's commitment to a two-state solution is in question, the last three Israeli prime ministers have supported the creation of a Palestinian state. In 2000 it was PA leader Yasir Arafat who twice rejected offers of a state with a capital in East Jerusalem.

Contrary to the assertion that the United States abdicated its role in Israeli-Arab peace-making, in 2002 George W. Bush became the first US President to call for a Palestinian state and to issue a plan, the Road Map, for arriving there. And contrary to the assertion that Hamas supports a two-state solution, the terrorist group's charter refuses to recognize Israel, obviating the possibility of partition. Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh has repeatedly stated that he will never recognize Israel.

While the Arab League's current proposal contains positive elements, you neglect to mention that it also demands a "right of return" for Palestinian refugees that has no basis in international law and would overwhelm Israel's Jewish majority. Still, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has expressed willingness to discuss the larger proposal with Arab interlocutors.

You raise the notion of a binational state but omit the fact that Israel, as it was intended by its founders and backed by the international community, would cease to exist. Demography would erase its *raison d'être*: the one and only Jewish State in the world. Why should Israel be subject to dismantlement against its will? Would other nation-states accept such a fate of national suicide? What would be the likely prospect of Jewish survival in such a setting, given the history of the region?

The path to a two-state solution, of creating a Palestinian state alongside Israel, with both living in peace and security, is clear. So, too, is the main obstacle: the steadfast refusal of the

Palestinian leadership to grasp Israel's outstretched hand for peace.

RICHARD SIDEMAN, *president*
American Jewish Committee

THE EDITORS REPLY

■ Recent Israeli prime ministers have paid lip service to the idea of a Palestinian state, as Bush did in his June 2002 speech. But both the Israeli government and the Bush Administration have consistently impeded progress toward a two-state solution, the former through rapid construction of the separation wall and expansion of settlements on Palestinian land, and the latter by publicly announcing US acceptance of Israeli annexation of huge West Bank settlement blocs, which would make a Palestinian state impossible. Arafat rejected the 2000 Camp David proposals for similar reasons: The Israelis insisted on annexing those settlement blocs, as well as retaining long-term control over the Jordan Valley and sovereignty over much of East Jerusalem—conditions that would have made an independent Palestinian state unviable.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh's most recent declaration that Hamas would accept a two-state solution appeared in his op-ed in the June 6 *Guardian*. And the Arab League proposal's language on return is remarkably moderate, calling for a "just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194" (*emphasis added*). This is diplomacy for recognition that while the right of return must be acknowledged, its full implementation is a matter for negotiation. That right is embedded in customary international law, as both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights affirm the right of displaced persons to return to their home.

A binational solution could work only if both parties agree to it. And any such solution would have to guarantee the civil, political and cultural rights of all the state's citizens. As for demography, population trends are already calling into question the Jewish state: 20 percent of its citizens are Palestinians, and growing relative to the Jewish population; and a significant percentage of its Russian population is non-Jewish. And that's in Israel proper. If one adds the territories Israel has controlled for forty years—a grip that's tightening daily—the balance of Jewish to Palestinian residents is roughly 50-50. Hence Meron Benvenisti's observation, also in our June 18 issue, that Israel is already a "de facto binational state."

THE EDITORS

letters@thenation.com

NOT YOUR GRANDFATHER'S EC 101

Amherst, Mass.

■ Let me add one flourish to Christopher Hayes's thoughtful and endearing description of hip heterodox economists ["Hip Heterodoxy," June 11] and introduce one complaint. A mainstream economist who had downed too many free drinks once asked me what my department was like. When I described it as heterodox he was confused, and informed me rather soberly that there were no homosexual departments. Of course, neither the orthodox nor the heterodox are orthosex. But sessions organized by the International Association for Feminist Economics have enlivened economics conferences for many years now. I'm disappointed by Hayes's failure to mention this, or to interview even one feminist economist for his story. Does he consider us unhet or just unhip?

NANCY FOLBRE

Professor of Economics
University of Massachusetts

San Diego

■ Christopher Hayes deftly spells out confusion in the field of economics. He avoids, however, two critical questions. First, is the "dismal science" science at all? Many find it nothing more than fancy (if not fanciful) statistics, not much different from actuarial studies. Insurance underwriters recognize that a person with a life expectancy of 74.5 years may live to be 100 or die at 50. Yet neoclassical economists seem surprised when the real world doesn't perform according to their theories. Witness the 2004 election and how many people voted against their own economic self-interest, violating neoclassical theories.

Second and more disturbing, Hayes uses the term "Nobel laureate" to identify various prominent economists. The so-called "Nobel Prize in Economics" is not one of the five awards stipulated in Alfred Nobel's 1896 will. It arrived nearly seventy years later, first awarded in 1969. It was instituted by the Riksbank (Sweden's central bank) "in memory of Alfred Nobel" as an effort to legitimize economics. Many physicists and mathematicians bristle at this award, claiming economics is not a science at all but uses mathematics to camouflage unproven and unprovable theories. Even Nobel's great-great-grandson Peter criticizes the prize as "illegitimate—a PR coup."

DONNA BOYLE

Greenbelt, Md.

■ Thank you for Christopher Hayes's excellent article. However, Hayes missed one of the most important new perspectives—ecological economics—which correctly links the dependence

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EDITORIALS

Get in It to Win It

Democratic activists have complained for years about a presidential nominating process largely defined by the first-caucus state of Iowa and the first-primary state of New Hampshire. Both states, it was said, were too white, too rural and too prone to personality politics and regional eccentricity. So a lot of progressives wanted to open up the primary and caucus schedule with more regional, racial and ideological diversity. Now that the process is changing—rapidly and radically—the challenge is to use it to our advantage.

It won't be easy. The 2008 race, the first since 1928 in which neither a sitting President nor Vice President is angling for the nomination, is proving to be exceptionally volatile. Neither party has a definitive front-runner. Presumed leaders, such as John McCain, have stumbled. Even after several rounds of high-profile debates, the fields continue to expand—with Fred Thompson preparing to leap into the GOP pack, while former Vice President Al Gore is a tantalizing prospect for Democrats. Then there is newly independent New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg stoking speculation about a run in the general election (see Micah L. Sifry, page 5), which could also feature Senator Chuck Hagel and Ralph Nader. It's enough to send even the most dedicated activist searching for a scorecard and a comfortable seat to watch the game.

But this competition can't be a spectator sport. The front-loading of primaries means that early moves will matter more than ever. Iowa and New Hampshire still come first, but not by much, as California, New York, Florida and now Illinois have elbowed their way into the early weeks of the nominating process. Instead of the leisurely calendar that once allowed candidates to build momentum, the first weeks of 2008 will see a mad rush that

could begin as early as January 2, if Florida's decision to flout party rules and schedule a January 29 primary spurs South Carolina, New Hampshire and Nevada to move up *their* primaries and caucuses. And the process should peak by February 5, when as many as twenty-five states choose delegates. The likelihood is that within weeks of the first voting, the nominations will be settled.

It is precisely the volatility of the '08 race that creates unprecedented opportunities for progressives: The February 5 "super-duper Tuesday" contests make it more necessary for candidates to appeal aggressively to grassroots activists, and no Democratic candidate will have enough money to "buy" every state, as long as progressives get serious about organizing.

The point is not to organize for a particular contender but rather to assure that whoever wins is accountable to our stances against the Iraq War and for restoration of civil liberties, a robust response to global warming and universal healthcare. All of these issues have wide popular support, perhaps none more than national healthcare—note the raves for Michael Moore's new film, *Sicko* (see Christopher Hayes, page 11).

The progressive voice on these issues will gain traction only if MoveOn.org, Democracy for America and Progressive Democrats of America, as well as unions, environmental groups and other issue-focused organizations, rapidly expand into a cohesive movement. New technologies make it easier than ever to organize voter lists and to communicate with voters about the candidates and the evolving dynamics of the race. In partnership with innovative state-based organizations, MoveOn.org, unions and other national groups should prepare interventions throughout the process. Such interventions are essential. Given the volatility of the election and the new technologies, this is perhaps the best opportunity in a generation to nominate a genuinely progressive candidate—a candidate who can win next November.

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High Stakes on Health

This is the second of a series looking at the "Ideas Primary" in Campaign '08.

lection 2008 will feature a fundamental debate about health-care. That debate will offer a stark contrast in goals and strategies: for or against coverage for all; a common government guarantee versus individualized, "market based" insurance.

Voters rank healthcare just below Iraq as a top concern. A March *New York Times*/CBS News poll found that nearly two-thirds of Americans believe government should guarantee health-care to all, and a majority say they're willing to pay higher taxes to get it. Healthcare looms very large for Democratic and independent voters. For Republican voters, however, other issues—immigration, tax cuts—rank higher. Not surprisingly, healthcare has moved quickly to the center of the Democratic debate, while Republican candidates have said comparatively little about it.

Among the GOP candidates, Representative Duncan Hunter bluntly states a common theme: "I'm against universal coverage." Republicans generally oppose mandates to provide healthcare, instead advocating "market mechanisms" that, they say, would make healthcare less expensive. As governor of Massachusetts, Mitt Romney led the effort to implement a universal state program that required companies and individuals to get healthcare. But he says very little about his plan now. "I don't like calling it universal coverage. That smacks of Hillarycare," Romney says. He adds, "The Democrats' path is always government-mandated, government-run, government insurance...[which is] almost by definition going to be inefficient, ineffective and expensive."

Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani has taken the lead in the Republican field. Scorning Democratic plans as "socialized medicine," Giuliani says the "problem with our health insurance is it's government and employer dominated. People don't make individual choices." He would accelerate the move away from employer-based insurance, giving individuals a tax credit of as much as \$15,000 to help pay for their own. But he wouldn't require people to self-insure, so with the young and healthy forgoing insurance and insurance companies imposing a higher premium for those purchasing outside a broad pool, this kind of individualized insurance is likely to drive costs up and coverage down.

Among Democrats, the debate was initially focused on incremental reforms, but activists demanded more, and the broken system requires it: Nearly half of people in the *Times*/CBS poll have had their coverage cut or had to pay more. A fourth of those with insurance reported that they had done without tests or treatment because it wasn't covered by their plan. Forty-seven million—15 percent of Americans—do not have health insurance, up some 6.8 million over the past seven years. Only comprehensive reform can address these problems.

Of the leading contenders, John Edwards was the first to put forth a comprehensive plan, projecting its costs and calling for rolling back many of Bush's tax cuts to pay for it. Barack Obama has followed suit, and a wary Hillary Clinton has begun a piecemeal rollout of what she promises will be a comprehensive plan. With little notice, Chris Dodd has laid out a comprehensive plan,

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similar to those of Edwards and Obama. Both Edwards and Obama would require employers to provide insurance for their employees or pay into a public plan. Employees could keep the plans they have at work or enroll in a Medicare-like public entity. Both candidates believe a public plan, open to all, would keep insurance companies honest. Edwards would require every person to have insurance; Obama would not. Edwards, Obama and Clinton all have detailed initiatives on saving costs, from bulk negotiations on prescription drugs to computerized record-keeping.

In contrast, Representative Dennis Kucinich and Mike Gravel argue forcefully for a single-payer plan—basically Medicare for all. Kucinich has co-sponsored legislation with Representative John Conyers that would allow people to choose their own doctor and eliminate insurance companies, using the hundreds of billions saved to cover everyone. Since it takes on the insurance industry directly, the Kucinich single-payer plan would trigger a furious, multibillion-dollar campaign by the insurance industry to scare the hell out of voters, a sequel to the “Harry and Louise” campaign that torpedoed the Clinton plan in 1993–94.

Obama and Edwards hope to avoid a direct face-off with insurance companies by offering them, as Obama puts it, “a seat at the table,” but they “don’t get to buy every chair.” On a level field, a public plan competing with the insurance companies would offer more comprehensive and less costly coverage. But will the field be level? As Trudy Lieberman reveals on page 14, insurance lobbies have pocketed massive subsidies for private plans that now compete with Medicare. The drug lobby has blocked Medicare from making bulk purchases of prescription drugs. With hundreds of billions at stake, no comprehensive reform can avoid taking on these powerful lobbies.

It’s early in the campaign, yet it’s already clear that we are headed into a high-stakes debate on healthcare. What will replace the broken corporate healthcare system: a broad public guarantee, or individualized plans purchased on the market? Do we fare better together or on our own? Americans want something done. The next year should provide them with a clear choice.

ROBERT L. BOROSAGE AND KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

Robert L. Borosage is co-director of the Campaign for America’s Future.

Bloomberg’s Day

Every four years, about a year or so before the presidential election, a crack opens in the two-party road to the White House, and suddenly everyone is talking about the possibility of a serious Independent Candidate for the presidency. Something in our dysfunctional political process seems to conjure the Independent Candidate out of thin air and then keep him or her afloat, at least for a while. Consider: One-third of the electorate identifies with neither the Ds nor the Rs; super-majorities think the nominating process takes too long and is too dominated by big money and special interests; and the major candidates frequently avoid controversial issues. These are conditions that have fostered the election of independent governors in a handful of states (Connecticut, Maine and Minnesota are the recent cases). So the no-

tion of a viable Independent Candidate is not pure fantasy.

Sometimes the major-party candidates are so cravenly bland or neglectful of a constituency that they propel an alienated outsider into making a run for office. Think George Wallace in 1968, breaking with the Democrats on civil rights; John Anderson in 1980, breaking with the Republicans over their rising alliance with the religious right; Ross Perot in 1992, breaking with both parties on their failure to tame the deficit; or Ralph Nader in 2000, breaking with the rightward retreat of the Clinton/Gore Democrats. Unfortunately, these sorts of candidates have either been too ideologically cranky to galvanize the angry middle of the American electorate into a real force, or they’ve just been true cranks.

Sometimes the buzz is about little more than celebrities’ idle comments, or their concurrent need to sell something, like themselves. Think of the second half of 1999, when Warren Beatty, Donald Trump and Cybill Shepherd all allowed their names to be floated as possible candidates for the ill-fated Reform Party’s nomination, or the fall of 1995, when Colin Powell teased the press about his intentions while he hawked his autobiography. Add in the media’s never-ending need to sell papers and attract eyeballs, and you often get a silly season of speculation about the chances of so-and-so to slide into the Oval Office.

In June New York City’s billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg announced that he was changing his party affiliation from Republican to independent, to “bring...my affiliation into alignment with how I have led and will continue to lead my city,” he said. That was all it took for the crack to open in the 2008 race, and something tells me that this time we are going to see the Independent Candidate gambit played by a pro who knows exactly what he is doing.

An actual Bloomberg effort to get onto the ballot in 2008 is highly unlikely for a number of reasons. As a longtime Democrat who only switched to the Republican Party to leapfrog past a crowded and divisive Democratic primary into the general election for mayor in 2001, Bloomberg is reportedly not interested in damaging the chances of Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama entering the White House. He’s been quoted asking, “What chance does a five-foot-seven billionaire Jew who’s divorced really have of becoming President?” He enjoys his privacy and spends many weekends away from the city, often in Bermuda (where neighbors of his 6,000-square-foot “cottage” reportedly include not only Perot but Italian poli-mogul Silvio Berlusconi). The odds that he would risk all that on an expensive bid for an office he might not win and a job that would drain him if he did are very low, in my view.

But Bloomberg doesn’t actually have to run for President to tilt the race his way, the classic and most beneficial role of any maverick or third-party candidate. That is, at least for the next ten months, when the first hard deadlines for ballot access close (in Texas). All he has to do is talk about his willingness to spend a half-billion dollars on a possible bid, visit some swing states every now and then and make a speech about how it’s more important to deliver effective government than score partisan points, and perhaps put a few consultants on retainer (I know of two people who keep themselves on call for him), and he will have maximized his leverage over the national debate at mini-

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mal cost. That is a move worthy of the businessman he is.

Merely by toying with a run, Bloomberg—who registered between 10 and 15 percent in the polls after he announced his change of party—can force the major candidates to pay attention to issues dear to his heart. Fortunately, many of them are sensible, like gun control, progressive immigration reform, reducing carbon emissions, trying new ways to break the poverty cycle and transparency in government. Even though he trampled civil rights when the Republican convention was held in New York City, and his police force continues to take an authoritarian approach toward free speech and assembly, Bloomberg has tried to calm, not fan, fears of terrorism. We could do a lot worse, given how many megalomaniacal billionaires this country seems to produce.

“I’m particularly upset that the big issues of the time keep getting pushed to the back, and we focus on small things that probably only inside the Beltway are important,” he said June 19 after his announcement. “When you talk to people around this country, they care about who’s going to pay their Social Security, they care about who’s going to pay their medical care, they care about immigration, about our reputation overseas. Nobody is willing to talk about those things. And I think that that’s exactly what the candidates should do. I’m going to speak out on those issues, and by not being affiliated with the party I think I’m going to have a better opportunity to do that.”

My main regret about Bloomberg’s taking over the role of Independent Candidate is that it is not being done in a way that builds small-d democratic capacity to influence the process—especially at a time when the Internet makes “sideways-up” organizing more viable than ever. Bloomberg’s billions give a lot of people an excuse to stay home instead of doing the grassroots work to build a broad challenge to the entrenched interests that dominate the major parties. In that, he is bad news for the vain-glorious efforts of Unity08, the brainchild of a couple of well-meaning political consultants who are seeking to marshal a million cyber-delegates to nominate an independent slate for 2008. He doesn’t need them.

Yes, the blogs are talking about Bloomberg today, but he’s talking at us, not with us. He may have made his money selling

high-priced computer terminals and data, but his approach to technology and the Internet is all top-down. His vaunted “311” universal phone number has indeed improved city services, but the communication is all one way. In 2001 Bloomberg capped his \$74 million campaign by mailing a videotape of his final campaign commercial to every household; in 2005 his re-election campaign had the best micro-targeting database services that money could buy. If anything, his entry onto the edge of the playing field will further accelerate the presidential money chase, giving an advantage to buckmeisters like Hillary Clinton and Mitt Romney over other contenders, putting serious pressure on Obama and draining funds from down-ballot candidates as a side effect.

Not that there isn’t room in this election cycle for a sane Perot to spend his way to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. As Democratic pollster Stanley Greenberg writes in the latest issue of *The American Prospect*, while conservatives and Republicans have never been more discredited in years, their reign of error has badly damaged America’s confidence in government’s ability to do anything right. He notes that more than six out of ten Americans say they believe elected officials don’t care what people like them think, and that when something is run by the government it is probably inefficient and wasteful. The current gridlock between Capitol Hill Democrats and the Bush White House only makes things worse. And the sight of committee chairs like David Obey defending the pork-barrel process as brazenly as any of his Republican predecessors doesn’t help either. Says Greenberg: “The odds are high that both Republicans and Democrats will end up staring down the barrel of a real third-party movement or a Perot-like candidate, which could dramatically affect presidential and Congressional races in 2008.”

If you think that is impossible, you don’t remember how quickly Perot caught fire in 1992. Six months ago Congressional Democrats promised the electorate change, but now they seem bogged down not just by Iraq but by the pressures of satisfying their own parochial interests. They still have a chance to rectify matters by enacting real changes in how government works and by doing some real housecleaning to demonstrate that accountability is more than a nice slogan. It’s fun to imagine that the specter of Bloomberg’s entry into the race may help Capitol Hill Democrats focus on the task at hand. I, for one, am not holding my breath.

MICAH L. SIFRY

CALVIN TRILLIN

BLAIR STEPS DOWN AT WESTMINSTER (THE PARLIAMENT, NOT THE DOG SHOW)

Blair called the press a feral beast. Today, Those British poodles are its favorite prey. So Gordon Brown may be OK, assuming He doesn’t go to W. for grooming.

Blackstone’s Bell

Friday, June 22, saw the stock market debut of The Blackstone Group, the biggest and splashiest of the private equity funds that have pretty much dominated the financial scene for the past several years. Investors poured \$4 billion into the firm, buying stock that would give them no voting rights in the hope of getting a piece of the profit-spinning energy that Blackstone and its colleagues have created in recent years.

Micah L. Sifry, the editor of *Personal Democracy Forum* and its new website *techpresident.com*, is the author of *Spoiling for a Fight: Third Party Politics in America* (Routledge).

“My Husband’s **SECRET** ... for Amazing **INTIMACY!**”

I just had to tell your readers about a recent experience I shared with my husband. First, let me just say he is a wonderful man. But, after being married for all these years, it seemed he was having confidence issues lately in AND out of bed. It was having a real negative effect on his virility and let's face it, it's not like we're newlyweds anymore.

Thankfully, we didn't have to deal with an embarrassing doctor's appointment or prescription, because everything changed a few days ago. I came home from work and something was different. He seemed more confident and excited than he'd been lately. He said he had found something that could help improve our recent bedroom issues, but it was a surprise. He had read about it online and we decided to give it a try. Well all I can say is I definitely felt sensations I'd never felt before ... in places I forgot existed. Best of all, there was clearly a difference in his erection quality and confidence. I can honestly say it was the most incredibly intimate experience I've ever had in my entire life.

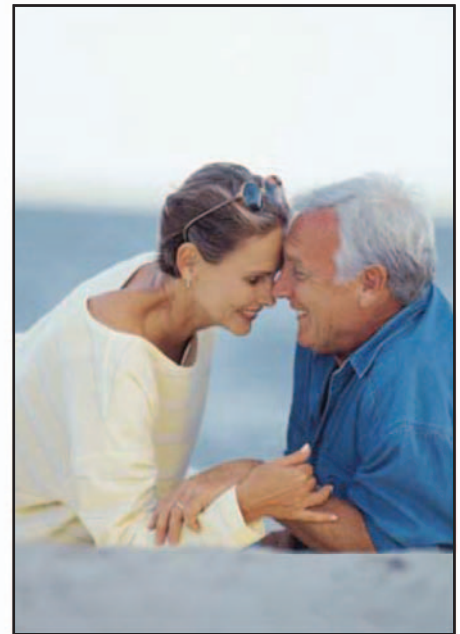
When I asked him to reveal his secret discovery – he wouldn't. So I did some snooping. It didn't take me long to figure it out. In his top drawer was a tube of **Maxoderm CONNECTION**. After reading the fine print and finding the website, I went online to www.maxodermct.com to discover more about this magic in a tube.

Maxoderm CONNECTION (of which I'm having my husband buy a lifetime supply) is a lotion that is applied topically to the most “intimate areas”. A delicate blend of ingredients, it helps improve stimulation directly at the source – that's when amazing things start to happen. Now he experiences improved erection quality and firmness and I experience more pleasure and stimulation than ever before! We aren't into taking pills of any kind – not even aspirin – so I was relieved to find he was using something topical without any potential systemic side effects you may experience with prescriptions. Unless you want to think of incredible intimacy as a side effect, because with **Maxoderm CONNECTION**, you just may experience incredible intimacy time and time again!

So ... please print this letter. Anyone who wants to experience amazing intimacy has to try **Maxoderm CONNECTION**. They need to tell their husbands about this product. Or just “accidentally” leave a tube lying around for them to “accidentally” find. I really want to thank the makers who developed **Maxoderm CONNECTION** for making a product that's had such an impact on our intimate relationship. It's really made a difference.

T.J.

T.J.
Phoenix, AZ



“I can honestly say
it was the most
incredibly
intimate
experience
I've ever had in
my entire life.”



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*P.S., Let your readers know I'm pretty sure they can still get a **FREE MONTH SUPPLY** of **Maxoderm CONNECTION** with their order by calling **1-800-993-1737** or by visiting their website at www.maxodermct.com, and **FOR A LIMITED TIME**, you can still get **\$200 worth of FREE GIFTS** with your order that are yours to keep – no questions asked. Oh and even better, their product is backed by a **90 Day Full Money Back Guarantee**.

COMMENT

They should be so lucky.

Over the years, hedge funds have gotten a lot more press than their private equity (PE) counterparts, but Blackstone's initial public offering (IPO) has changed that. There are considerable similarities between hedge funds and PE. Both consist of pools of capital contributed by institutional investors, like pension funds and university endowments, as well as some very rich individuals, and are run by a relatively small group of very highly paid money managers. But their investment styles are generally rather different. Hedge funds move in and out of positions often with lightning speed. PE operates on a longer time scale. Their typical *modus operandi* is to buy up whole companies (public companies, whose shares trade on the open markets), take them private, slim them down and sell them—either to other companies, or to float their stock on the markets afresh, after having worked their magic on them.

The numbers surrounding PE are huge. There are more than 170 funds with \$1 billion or more in assets. They collectively raised \$221 billion last year from outside investors, up sevenfold from a decade ago, and did \$475 billion in deals, thirteen times as much as just five years ago. This flood of money has helped drive the stock market back past its 2000 highs, first reached at the peak of the dot-com mania.

Who has benefited from all this? Apologists like to say all of us, since it's made our economy more efficient and our pension funds fatter. But the economy of the past several years has been lackluster, with GDP growth unimpressive and wages barely growing. Half of us don't have a pension plan, and most of those who do don't have all that much in their retirement accounts. Even the institutional investors who've poured all those billions into PE funds (and hedge funds) haven't done spectacularly well. Most people who study the matter conclude that the returns aren't all that great, especially considering the risks involved.

But there's no doubt that some people have made out like bandits from the PE racket: the fund managers. They pay themselves huge fees at every turn. There are management fees (deducted from the outside investors' returns), as well as fees billed to the companies that the funds own (consulting fees, monitoring fees—even termination fees when the firms are sold or go public). And there are the (typically huge) profits when the managers sell the firms they'd bought only a few years earlier.

And how do the companies in the PE portfolios raise the cash to pay all these fees? Here's how former hedge fund manager Andy Kessler put it in the *Wall Street Journal*: "Cut spending, workers, offices, factories and advertising, and with tech companies now in play, cut R&D, their lifeblood. Don't mistake financial engineering for company building."

Aside from Blackstone, other big names in the PE business include The Carlyle Group (famous for its connections to the national security state), Bain (the place that made Mitt Romney rich) and Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (KKR, which was big in the 1980s, faded in the 1990s but has made a comeback over the last few years).

But Blackstone's IPO has made it the star. Founded in 1985

by Peter Peterson (Nixon's Commerce Secretary, famous for his gloominess about the future of Social Security) and Steven Schwarzman, Blackstone now has almost \$90 billion under management. It owns all or part of some forty companies, among them Freescale Semiconductor, ACNielsen, TRW, Orangina, Equity Office Properties (the biggest commercial landlord in the United States) and Madame Tussaud's Wax Museums. Last year Schwarzman "earned" \$398 million; Peterson, \$213 million.

So why did Blackstone go public, given those fat paychecks and the lack of scrutiny enjoyed by private partnerships? To make even more money, of course: Schwarzman will pocket \$677 million from the offering (while retaining a quarter of the firm's shares); Peterson, \$1.9 billion. But that payday may come at a high cost. Inspired in part by the Blackstone IPO, some members of Congress would like to put an end to the industry's favored tax status, under which it pays a rate of just 15 percent, less than half the standard corporate rate. (Prospects for passage are murky, and a presidential signature is unlikely.) CNBC is now full of hysterical worry about a war on the rich—nay, a war on prosperity itself.

While it's easy to parse Blackstone's motives for going public, why were the shares such a hit on opening day? The inner circle of the firm retains all the voting rights. The inner circle will pay itself what it deems appropriate, and the public shareholders will have to be content with leftovers. If there's ever a conflict of interest between the Blackstone managers and the public shareholders, the managers are free to resolve it in their own interest, and the shareholders will have no recourse.

The IPO itself has a sound of last call about it. There's little doubt that Schwarzman and Peterson are among the craftiest capitalists on earth, and if they think this is a good time to cash in, then they may be telling us something. What that something might be is an interesting question. At the very least, they're suggesting that the PE boom is about to go bust. Or, more broadly, many of the adventures in financial innovation contrived in the exuberant markets of the past several years are about to follow the subprime mortgage sector into crisis. The investment bank Bear Stearns is bailing out a couple of its in-house hedge funds that made some bad bets on murky financial instruments; this could be a taste of things to come, especially if interest rates continue to rise around the world.

There's an old saying on Wall Street that they don't ring a bell at a market top. But the Blackstone IPO sounds a little like a tintinnabulation.

DOUG HENWOOD

Doug Henwood edits the Left Business Observer and is in the early stages of writing a book on the American ruling class, whoever that might be.

SUMMER SCHEDULE: With this issue, we begin our bi-weekly schedule, which continues until the end of August.

ON THE WEB: Supremely Bad Decisions: Bruce Shapiro on the High Court's drift to the right.

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ERIC ALTERMAN

The Assault on Reality

That Al Gore's 2000 presidential candidacy was treated unconscionably by most members of the mainstream media is not really arguable by sentient beings. The very idea that a candidate like George W. Bush—extremist, incompetent, unprepared for office, addicted to cronyism and incapable of admitting even the simplest human error—could have been held by so many reporters to be a better choice for President than the two-time Vice President, Senator, Representative and environment and nuclear weapons expert, to say nothing of his central role in the Clinton Administration's successful two-term presidency, would be laughable were its consequences less tragic. And yet in that election, the media made Al Gore out to be a liar because so many reporters chose to misreport his remarks or take them out of context. To top it off, they made a joke of their maliciousness, mocking Gore for alleged mendacities that were largely the results of their carelessness and deliberate misrepresentation.

Gore has since moved on to become not only one of America's most powerful progressive voices but also, when it comes to the dangers posed by climate change, something of a secular prophet. *An Inconvenient Truth* has turned out to be perhaps the most influential political argument by a private citizen since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. The book version of the movie and his newest tome, *The Assault on Reason*, are runaway bestsellers. Gore is a contender for this year's Nobel Peace Prize. And time has more than borne out the harsh assessments he has offered of George W. Bush over the past seven years, for which pundits like Charles Krauthammer and Joe Klein called him, literally, crazy.

And yet within the hermetically sealed confines of the American MSM, little has changed. In his new book Gore offers a complicated and depressing indictment of our present predicament, focusing on the dishonesty of our politics and the toothlessness of our tabloid-obsessed media. Resting as it does on reasoning derived from the likes of Jürgen Habermas and other philosophers, environmental scientists and even neuroscientists, the book could not help but trigger the MSM's reflexive anti-intellectualism, to say nothing of their loathing of its author.

Witness the *Washington Post*, whose reporters in 2000 ran with Republican Party press releases purporting to be Gore's own words. Amazingly, the paper's recent treatment of Gore has been even more nakedly hostile, sometimes bizarrely so. First out of the gate was *Governing* magazine editor Alan Ehrenhalt, writing in the paper's Sunday *Book World*, who chose not to focus his review on the work itself but instead offered up a stream of attacks on Gore's personality. Presenting no evidence, Ehrenhalt complained of Gore's "consistent ability to express fundamentally reasonable sentiments—often important ones—in ways that annoy the maximum possible number of people." Gore's movie, he said, was "smug and self-centered"—again, no evidence. True, he added that "much that he writes seems to be on the mark." Too bad it was written by an author with "an incurable habit of calling more attention to himself



than to the ideas he wishes to communicate." Evidence? Zip.

Next came *Post* news columnist Dana Milbank. After attending a Gore speech he observed, "Even if Gore were speaking before a sellout crowd at Verizon Center, he would still be the smartest guy in the room. He reminded his listeners of this repeatedly last night," in a manner Milbank found "all too frequently, pedantic." With considerable condescension, Milbank added, "Not that you'd doubt Gore on these points, but, just in case, there

are 273 endnotes," as if offering readers access to one's sourcing—as any serious nonfiction author save Bob Woodward is expected to do—is another example of what a self-satisfied smartypants we're dealing with.

Not long afterward the *Post's* Outlook section published yet another assault on Gore, this one by *Weekly Standard* editor Andrew Ferguson. Astonishingly, Ferguson began his screed by asserting, "You can't really blame Al Gore for not using footnotes in his new book.... It's a sprawling, untidy blast of indignation, and annotating it with footnotes would be like trying to slip rubber bands around a puddle of quicksilver." I say "astonishingly" because, as the annoyed Mr. Milbank pointed out in the same newspaper, the book contains 273 source notes spread across *twenty pages* right there in the back. So common was the anti-Gore animus that it apparently blinded everyone involved with the piece, thereby allowing Ferguson to humiliate himself as well as the newspaper with an accusation so amateurish it dissipated with a mere glance at the book.

While I have focused on the *Post*, it's not as if the rest of the media distinguished themselves—or diverged from their circa-2000 scripts. At ABC News, Diane Sawyer badgered Gore about his political ambitions, Jake Tapper compared the book to a Michael Moore missive and Terry Moran portrayed it as an act of vengeance. On the *New York Times* op-ed page David Brooks mocked Gore as a "Vulcan Utopia[n]," and Maureen Dowd focused, laserlike, on crucial features like Gore's waistline and his author photo while terming the ex-VP a "presidential flirt," a "righteous tease" and a "high-minded scold." And in a sentence that may rival Ferguson's for the Pulitzer Prize for Irresponsible Imagination in the Service of Personal Obsession—were one ever to be established—Dowd wrote that during his Diane Sawyer interview, Gore "almost seems to want to sigh and roll his eyes." Never mind, dear reader, that Al Gore neither sighed nor rolled as much as a single eyelash. To Dowd, writing in the newspaper of record, he "almost seemed to want to," and that's good enough.

So give George W. Bush credit. He may lie about counterproductive wars, destroy our reputation abroad, ignore Katrina victims, approve torture, blow up our balance of payments, ignore scientific evidence, undermine our Constitution and turn the Justice Department over to a collection of ideological hacks... At least he doesn't make Maureen Dowd think he wants to roll his eyes. ■

ARTICLES

MICHAEL MOORE'S *SICKO*



CHRISTOPHER HAYES

About forty minutes into *Sicko*, Michael Moore's excellent, frustrating new documentary about the American health-care industry, Ronald Reagan makes his first and only appearance. It's surprising, if only because, unlike in his previous film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Moore focuses relatively little attention on the villains in his story, choosing instead simply to allow their victims to tell their tales. It's a montage of hard luck and innocence. But after introducing us to the horror stories all too typical among even the 250 million Americans fortunate enough to have health insurance, Moore takes a few moments for a brief history lesson. How, he asks, did we get here? And it's in this time warp that we encounter the Gipper. This is not Gipper the Governor or Gipper the President or even Gipper the B-list actor. This is Gipper, silver-tongued shill for the interests of capital.

It's a little-studied chapter of Reagan's career, but perhaps the most formative. As chronicled in Thomas Evans's *The Education of Ronald Reagan: The General Electric Years and the Untold Story of His Conversion to Conservatism*, Reagan was employed by GE first as a spokesman and later as a kind of employer-to-employee ambassador. With management facing a restive labor force, an obscure PR guru named Lemuel Boulware hatched the idea of using the emerging techniques of public relations to turn factory-line workers against their own unions. Reagan would be the vessel for this message, and it was in the hours he spent propagandizing the working class about the benefits of free markets that he forged the distinctive Reagan appeal: hard-right economics delivered in the sunny cadence of an amiable uncle.

So as momentum for national, universal healthcare built

during the Truman Administration, foes such as the American Medical Association sought to build grassroots opposition. In an ingenious stroke, as Moore reports in *Sicko*, it organized thousands of coffee klatches across the country where suburban housewives could sip coffee, gossip and listen to a special recorded message about the evils of socialized medicine, a message delivered by the one and only Ronald Reagan.

The presence of Reagan in the film, making an argument that is the inverse of *Sicko*'s, is fitting. Moore's entire post-*Roger & Me* career can be understood as a multimedia attempt to undo Reagan's great achievement: persuading blue-collar factory workers and other members of the working class to embrace his heady brew of jingoism, anticommunism, contempt for government and admiration for the virtues of unfettered capitalism.

For years Moore has, like Ahab pursuing the whale, been hunting the elusive Reagan Democrat—the heartland-dwelling, beer-drinking, blue-collar guy (or gal) who bowls on the weekend, loves his country and is fighting to stay afloat in winner-take-all America. He may look on the left with contempt, but it's not because he doesn't intuitively share its views: He is a visceral collectivist and unionist and an enemy of corporations. He is ready, Moore believes, to come over to our side, if only we would talk to him.

That's why Moore spends the final chapter of his first book, *Downsize This!*, talking to Norman Olson, a co-founder of the Michigan Militia: "You know, you guys were right in the sixties," Olson tells him. "The government lied to us.... So when we finally wised up in the nineties after all these jobs were lost, where were you liberals when we needed your help?" Writing in this magazine in November 1997, in an article titled "Is the Left Nuts? (Or Is It Me?)," Moore asked a variation of the same question, "just who the hell is reading this? Who is the *Nation* readership? Is it my brother-in-law, Tony, back in Flint, who last night was installing furnace ducts until 9 o'clock?"

It is Tony the furnace-installer who haunts Moore's work like a specter, and for whom the rotund and slovenly Moore acts as a kind of aw-shucks proxy. But the central paradox of his career is that his success in reaching the Tonys of the world is spotty at best. Though he's always communicated his politics in a comedic, accessible, populist vocabulary, his public image is that of an ideologue, a lighting rod, a polarizing figure: more Barry Goldwater than Ronald Reagan.

In what may be a tacit acknowledgment of this unfortunate fact, *Sicko* is different from Moore's last two efforts. Not just because of an absence of gimmicky gotcha moments, or a reduction in screen time for Moore himself, but because its topic isn't fundamentally polarizing in the way his previous works were. There's a whole lot of Americans who love their guns, and in 2004 there were a lot of Americans who loved their President, but it's pretty hard to find anyone who loves their health insurance company.

At its best, Sicko uses healthcare as a kind of gateway drug to much harder stuff: a robust social democratic vision.

Moore's solution is simple: Get rid of the health insurance companies. Don't just tinker with the healthcare system, banish profit from the delivery of healthcare altogether. Socialize it. Make it a public good. It's a testament to the health insurance industry's power that as "universal healthcare" lurches toward the political middle, this proposal seems in some ways more radical than ever. Moore recognizes that if single-payer is ever going to come to America, it's going to be over the insurance companies' dead bodies. One way of understanding *Sicko* is as the opening salvo in a battle to make that happen. The movie alone can't do that, which is part of the reason Moore has teamed up with the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee, the labor union most zealously committed to single-payer. It'll be sending its members, along with like-minded doctors, to every single showing of the film's opening night to talk up single-payer to audiences.

And it's currently rolling across the country in a multi-city tour designed to leverage the film's publicity to push single-payer back into the national conversation.

But *Sicko* is more than a potent weapon in the battle for single-payer, because in a deeper sense, the movie isn't really about healthcare. At its best, it uses healthcare as a kind of gateway drug to much harder stuff: a robust social democratic vision, articulated eloquently by legendary British Labour gadfly Tony Benn, who waxes poetic in the film about the radical promise of democracy to move power from the "wallet to the ballot." It's the extension of the logic of democracy into provisioning of public goods that provides the philosophical justification for socialized medicine. "The principle," as Benn says, "is solidarity."

As we sat in a movie theater in Bellaire, Michigan, an overwhelmingly Republican town where Moore and his wife, Kathleen, own a house and where Kathleen is vice chair of the local county Democratic Party, I asked Moore if the movie was intended as an argument for social democracy. His eyes lit up. "That's correct," he said. "You know, it works for the fire department, why can't it work for healthcare? They're both life-and-death issues, and we agree that profit should have no interest at all in how we run our fire department."

It's a message at once subversive and nonthreatening. Look at Canada, Moore argues in the film, or England or—gasp—France, where Moore even spends one scene reveling in the bourgeois comforts of a "typical" French couple as a means of rebutting arguments about the country's onerous tax burden. Or look at the United States: We "socialize" a lot of things here in America, Moore notes, as clips roll by of police officers and schoolteachers and public libraries. Why not this most crucial and important service?

That's the argument in a nutshell. "It's a simple thought," Moore told me, "but I think people get it when you put it like that." Oprah sure did. During Moore's recent appearance on her show, she was careful not to seem to be endorsing anything too radical, and Moore obliged by saying that healthcare wasn't a "partisan issue" and he was looking to reach across the aisle.

Christopher Hayes, a *Nation* contributing writer, is senior editor at *In These Times* and Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow at *The Nation* Institute.

Are you missing the luxury of warm, relaxing baths? Well, grab your towel!

By John Fleming

For many of us, nothing is more relaxing than a long, luxurious bath. Unfortunately, because of safety concerns, many people, particularly older people, have to forego this simple pleasure. Sure, you can spend big bucks to remodel your bathroom to provide a bathtub you can use, but who wants to do that? Now there's a better way, and it lets you use the bath that's in your home today.

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Then Oprah turned to the audience and said she finally “got it” when in the film Moore points out that we don’t charge for the services of firemen or think profit should have anything to do with firefighting. Then she told her audience to go out and see the film.

It’s not surprising to find commentators noting, as Oprah did, that this film is less political than Moore’s previous offering. It’s less caustic, less outraged. But to call it less political than *Fahrenheit 9/11* is a category error. *Fahrenheit* was an intensely partisan project, focused with laserlike precision on building a damning brief indicting the Bush Administration. And like a lawyer, Moore was only too happy to grab whatever argument he could find, even if it was at the expense of internal consistency. The film, while effective as propaganda, suffered a bit from this ad hoc approach, like the old law school chestnut about “arguing in the alternative”: The kettle was in perfect condition when I returned it; it was broken when I borrowed it; and I never borrowed the damn kettle in the first place.

Sicko is far, far less partisan than *Fahrenheit*, but much more ideological. And as such, it is more consistent in what it offers—with one major caveat. The film’s final half-hour, in which Moore takes 9/11 rescue workers to Cuba, serves only to reinforce the decades-old slander that equates social democracy with repressive socialism. It’s a major miscalculation and nearly squanders the first hour and a half of the film in which Moore so deftly guts arguments that socialized medi-

cine represents the vanguard of Marxism. But that final section aside, the film functions as a compelling advertisement for an alternative way of ordering society, one in which, as in France, there’s vacation, paid sick time, doctors who make house calls and even, amazingly, a state-supplied nanny who will come to your house and do your laundry after you’ve had a child. Who wouldn’t want that?

The healthcare industry, for one, and it’s betting that it can once again persuade Americans not to want it either. At a press conference after the American premiere, Moore said that in response to the film we should expect to see all the old chestnuts rolled out by the health insurance industry: “Canada’s bad, they’ve got long lines they wait in, you know, blah, blah, blah,” said Moore. “In the Canadian system, there is no wait if you have an emergency situation, if it’s a life-and-death issue. The wait to see a specialist or if it’s elective surgery, I think the most recent statistic I saw was that it was down to four weeks. But you know, sometimes that’s what you have to do when you share with everyone—you have to wait.”

Moore continued, “When you share the pie, sometimes you have to wait for your slice. Sometimes you get the first slice, sometimes you get the third slice, sometimes,” Moore chuckled, “you get the last slice. But the important thing is that you get a slice, everybody gets a slice of this pie. That’s not what happens in this country.”

“There are no easy answers,” Reagan once said, “but there are simple answers.” Social democracy as pie. The Gipper himself couldn’t have said it better. ■

UNDER THE GUISE OF ‘CONSUMER CHOICE,’ CONGRESS IS SLOWLY DEFUNDING MEDICARE.

The Medicare Privatization Scam

TRUDY LIEBERMAN

In the next few weeks Congress will decide whether to cut \$54 billion in overpayments to Medicare insurers, igniting a battle that may well determine whether the program survives. On one side are Medicare supporters, who want it to continue as a successful social insurance program. On the other is the insurance industry, which is spending millions and lobbying hard to put Medicare on a fast track to privatization, a goal long sought by fiscal conservatives and their allies in right-wing think tanks.

The seeds of the conflict were sown in 2003, when Congress passed the Medicare Modernization Act (MMA), which gives seniors a prescription drug benefit that is sold and adminis-



tered by private insurers, not the government. This drug benefit, known as Part D, opened new markets for insurers, some of which have profited handsomely from the government’s gift. The story of one of those companies, Humana, a forty-six-year-old carrier based in Louisville, Kentucky, shows what’s at stake.

Before 2003 Humana, a regional company peddling health insurance, including HMOs, was hardly a household name. One of its policies had been a big money loser, and the company was struggling to dig its way out of a financial hole. Vice president Steve Brueckner called the MMA “an unprecedented opportunity to establish relationships,” and his company made the most of it. Humana gained 4 million new policyholders and reported to stockholders in April that it had amassed “record breaking revenues.” What’s more, Humana has become a national brand poised to sell policies in the non-Medicare market, where people will increasingly be forced to buy their own health coverage, especially if an “individual mandate” becomes

Trudy Lieberman, who writes frequently for The Nation on health policy, is director of the health and medicine reporting program at the Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY. Research support was provided by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute.



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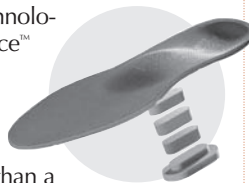
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"It's the only insole that eliminates the major cause of foot pain – weak foot muscles."

Dr. Peter J. Fowler,
Orthopedic Surgeon

ment and stability," says Dr. Fowler.

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a solution for the country's healthcare woes. "Part D transformed the company," says Bridget Maehr, an analyst for A.M. Best, an insurance rating service.

Humana's game plan centered on the options the MMA gave seniors for obtaining their benefits. They could keep traditional Medicare, in which the government provides the benefits, and buy a "stand-alone" drug benefit; or they could get the new drug coverage plus regular Medicare benefits provided by one of the Medicare Advantage plans, which include HMOs, the less restrictive preferred provider organizations (PPOs) and private fee-for-service plans, which usually offer traditional Medicare benefits, drug coverage and benefits for extras like dental, vision and chiropractic care. There are no limits on specialist referrals, and seniors can choose any doctor who accepts the insurer's fee schedule.

Humana saw gold in Medicare Advantage plans and embarked on a strategy of government-sanctioned bait and switch.

Some Medicare Advantage plans were not new. Medicare HMOs had been around since the 1970s. But by the late 1990s, conservatives had seized on HMOs, as well as new options such as medical savings accounts and PPOs, as ways to speed up privatization. Under the guise of "consumer choice," always a popular concept, Congress authorized four new kinds of plans, in the 1997 Balanced Budget Act, that would compete with traditional Medicare.

In theory, private plans, particularly managed care, would reduce the program's escalating costs. Government payments, it was argued, would allow these plans to offer both standard and extra benefits and encourage efficient, low-cost care. However, after 2003 the government began shoveling huge sums of money into the Medicare Advantage plans to entice seniors to leave the traditional program—in effect subsidizing privatization even more and bringing right-wing think tanks like the Heritage Foundation closer to their objective of ending Medicare as social insurance. The ultimate goal, of course, is to make seniors bear future costs, sparing their benefactors the need to pay more taxes to keep Medicare afloat. This year the government will pay insurers on average 12 percent more than it costs to provide the same benefits to people who stay in the traditional program, according to the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC), an independent group that advises Congress. HMOs will get 10 percent more, but private fee-for-service plans will get a whopping 19 percent more, a subsidy that lets them offer rock-bottom premiums and lots of extras—at least for now.

An unlikely player in the 1997 debate was the National Right to Life Committee. Worried that Medicare HMOs would euthanize old people, the committee lobbied Congress to allow private fee-for-service plans in the 1997 law as an alternative to managed care. Carriers were slow to market them, and in December 2005 only about 200,000 Medicare beneficiaries had signed up. But thanks to the federal honey pot, all that has changed. By February of this year, 1.3 million seniors had chosen fee-for-service plans, a sixfold increase that makes them the fastest-growing segment of the Medicare Advantage program.

Former House Speaker Dennis Hastert of Illinois also did his part to give an edge to certain fee-for-service plans. As Congress

put the finishing touches on a catch-all bill late last year, Hastert got the House Rules Committee to insert a provision that gives sellers a larger window of time to sell these plans. They can be sold all year, not just between November 15 and March 31, the only time other Medicare Advantage plans can be sold. According to the *New York Times*, Aon, a large Chicago-based carrier, pushed for the change to help its subsidiary Sterling Life, the first carrier to market private fee-for-service plans in 2000. Aon recently told stock analysts that its health insurance business had a strong first quarter with good growth, "driven primarily by Sterling." According to the Center for Responsive Politics, Aon

is the twentieth-largest insurance contributor to political campaigns. It has given generously to the Illinois Republican Party and to Hastert.

In the 2003–04 election cycle,

Hastert received a run-of-the-mill contribution of \$5,000; in 2005–06, as fee-for-service plans were becoming more important, Aon and its affiliates gave Hastert \$23,900.

From the start, Humana saw gold in Medicare Advantage and embarked on a strategy of government-sanctioned bait and switch: Offering the lowest premiums in most counties across the United States (some as low as \$1.87 per month), and selling through agents stationed in Wal-Mart stores, Humana signed up more than 3 million seniors just for its stand-alone drug benefit. It was willing to trade off smaller profits for the prospect of eventually switching seniors to the more lucrative Medicare Advantage plans. On average, seniors pay about \$100 a year for Humana's stand-alone plans, versus about \$800 for its other Medicare Advantage plans. To get people into those other plans, Oklahoma regulators say, it paid agents commissions that were five times higher than commissions for stand-alone plans. This spring Humana announced that 100,000 people had moved to Medicare Advantage plans, and most chose private fee-for-service options. "It reflects good value for seniors and their preferences," says Humana's outgoing chief actuary, John Bertko. It's also good value for Humana. Says one Washington insurance consultant: "An additional 100,000 people contributing to top line revenue is not insignificant—it's an extra billion dollars."

Private fee-for-service plans are also catching on with United Healthcare, Aetna and Blue Cross Blue Shield, the country's insurance giants, which like these plans not only because of generous government payments but also because they are easy to administer. There are no cumbersome networks of doctors and hospitals to police and little oversight of the quality of treatment delivered to beneficiaries. So insurers are prospecting for new markets, selling fee-for-service plans to employers obligated to provide health benefits for their retired workers. The Michigan Public School Employee Retirement System, for example, just moved 115,000 retirees into a fee-for-service plan sold by Michigan Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Nearly 20 percent of the 43 million Medicare beneficiaries have enrolled in Medicare Advantage, up from 13 percent in 2004. Citigroup estimates that one-quarter of all beneficiaries will belong to one by 2010. "Enormous growth prospects remain," Citigroup analyst Charles Boorady told investors in February.

All that, of course, depends on what happens in Congress. When the Congressional Budget Office estimated the bill for the overpayments at \$54 billion for five years and \$149 billion over ten, cuts seemed likely. After all, Medicare's chief actuary, Richard Foster, has said that overpayments shorten the life of Medicare trust funds by two years and raise premiums that all beneficiaries pay for doctor and outpatient services. MedPAC has recommended giving all Medicare Advantage plans no more than it costs the government to provide benefits under the traditional program. "I don't see any possible defense for the overpayments," says Robert Berenson, MD, a senior fellow at the Urban Institute. "Managed care has been ineffective at controlling costs in the commercial sector. Why would we want to turn Medicare over to private plans and abandon traditional Medicare, where if we wanted to, we could actually manage costs?" For example, Congress could lift the MMA prohibition on negotiating lower drug prices with pharmaceutical companies. But earlier this year the Senate refused to do that, bowing to lobbying pressure from Big Pharma, which believes government negotiations will lead to the dreaded price controls.

Some HMOs have not been particularly good at improving care. A 2005 study by The Commonwealth Fund found that beneficiaries enrolled in for-profit health plans received significantly lower-quality care than those belonging to not-for-profit plans when it came to certain procedures like giving patients appropriate medications after heart attacks. (Most Medicare beneficiaries belong to for-profit HMOs.)

Despite convincing evidence for cutting payments, America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), a trade association of insurance companies and HMOs, has managed to marshal strong support in Congress for continuing them; many legislators see nothing wrong with seniors reaping extra benefits from private fee-for-service plans, which they argue bring more choice to constituents, especially in rural areas without managed care. "It's absolutely brilliant how this has been orchestrated," says Bonnie Burns, a training and policy specialist with California Health Advocates. AHIP has turned the usual industry/consumer lobbying dynamic on its head, casting legitimate consumer groups like California Health Advocates and the Medicare Rights Center as bad guys for wanting cuts and the insurance industry as good guys for wanting more money poured into the program. Consumer groups generally advocate more money for social programs, but in this case they see the overpayments as a strategy to destroy Medicare.

To confuse legislators even more, the industry has called on its own sham "consumer" group, the Coalition for Medicare Choices, to push its agenda on the Hill. AHIP founded the group back in 1999 and still provides administrative support, according to spokesman Mohit Ghose. The address on the coalition's website turns out to be the same one as Democracy & Data Communications, a public relations counseling firm whose clients include AHIP, Humana and United Healthcare, another carrier riding the Part D gravy train with lucrative deals to sell plans to members of AARP, the retirees' organization. The coalition

now has 400,000 members, in every state; and the group has gained 140,000 new members in the past sixty days. Its main purpose seems to be ginning up letters and calls to members of Congress "to protect choices and additional benefits provided through the Medicare Advantage program." Sterling Life's website, for instance, tells visitors about the Coalition for Medicare Choices and urges them to send letters—sample included. Nowhere does it say that the coalition is a creature of the industry's trade association.

AHIP has also played the race card, forming a minority advisory committee of community leaders "to protect low-income and minority seniors from Medicare cuts." According to its press release, members, including representatives of the NAACP, Latino and Korean groups, and churches,

AHIP has turned the usual industry/consumer lobbying dynamic on its head, casting legitimate consumer groups as bad guys for wanting cuts.

will "reach out to members of Congress and provide guidance as the Coalition for Medicare Choices conducts grassroots efforts in their communities." This spring Hilary Shelton, director of the NAACP's Washington bureau, and Rosa Rosales, national president of LULAC, the League of United Latin American Citizens, sent letters to Congressional leaders arguing that minority members would be hurt by the cuts. They cited statistics from a study done for the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association by Emory University health economist Ken Thorpe showing that more low-income and minority Medicare beneficiaries obtain supplemental coverage from private plans than from other sources, so cuts would hurt them. (A Center on Budget and Policy Priorities analysis says Thorpe's study is misleading because it inflates the importance of Medicare Advantage plans by excluding those who get coverage from retiree plans and from Medicaid, which is the primary source of coverage for low-income seniors.) United Healthcare has hired former Ohio Congressman Louis Stokes, a founder of the Congressional Black Caucus, to add lobbying heft to the effort. AHIP has targeted for special attention fifty legislators, primarily Democrats and members from rural areas where a lot of private fee-for-service plans have been sold.

Enmeshed in this political clash are the demands of doctors, who are facing a mandated 10 percent cut in their Medicare fees; the need to reauthorize and expand the State Children's Health Insurance Plan (SCHIP); and the consequences of tax cuts over the years. The fate of Medicare's overpayments may well be decided at this intersection of healthcare and budget politics. Under Washington's budget neutrality rules, new programs or expansions must have a "pay for," that is, money coming from an existing pot of revenue or new taxes, which isn't likely. Medicare overpayments are the juiciest target.

The American Medical Association, a large donor to political campaigns, is eyeing the overpayments as a way to redirect money to its members, who are threatening to withhold services from Medicare beneficiaries if their fees are cut. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a far less powerful voice, argues that a substantial portion of the money now going to insurers could be used to expand health coverage for some of the 9 million uninsured children, many of whom are eligible but not covered under

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SCHIP, setting up a confrontation between old people and children. Without savings from the cuts, the center says, it may be impossible to allocate anything close to the \$50 billion over the next five years to expand SCHIP. Such an expansion would move the country closer to universal insurance coverage, which presidential candidates say they want. Of the Senate Democrats who will vote on the issue, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton both say they support cutting the Medicare overpayments.

If AHIP wins, however, Medicare beneficiaries will lose in the long run. Some have already started to lose. "There's an explicit decision to create a funding crisis for Medicare predicated on overpayment to private plans," says the Urban Institute's Berenson. MedPAC chairman Glenn HackbARTH has warned that the overpayments weaken Medicare financially and threaten the government's ability to sustain it. Overpayments raise overall costs, and the program's trustees have already signaled looming financial troubles for the trust funds. A little-publicized provision in the MMA requires that if the trustees estimate in two consecutive reports that more than 45 percent of Medicare's budget in the next six years will come from general revenues (which partly finance doctor and outpatient services), the President must propose legislation to bring costs below 45 percent. Trustees say that point will be reached in 2013.

That means benefits could be drastically cut and more costs shifted to beneficiaries, hastening the conversion of Medicare from a social insurance program to a defined contribution or voucher plan, under which the government would give seniors a set amount of money each year to buy coverage from private carriers. If the money is insufficient over time, the cost of ever-rising medical care will shift to beneficiaries, who will have to pay more out of pocket for insurance or foot the medical bills themselves. "It's a very scary thing," says Marilyn Moon, vice president of the American Institutes for Research, a large social science research nonprofit, and a former Medicare trustee. "What looks good today could look pretty terrible in five years. If you get to the point of a defined contribution, people will be hurt." Those hurt the most will be the low-income beneficiaries that minority groups doing the bidding of AHIP want to protect.

Beneficiaries who flock to Medicare Advantage plans because of the low premiums and the promise of extra benefits may be hurt long before full privatization becomes a reality. Marketing abuses and hidden traps in policies, reminiscent of the Medicare supplement market two decades ago, are starting to pinch. With some of the Medicare Advantage plans, seniors may end up paying more out of pocket than they would under traditional Medicare. Take hospital copayments, for example. Most private fee-for-service plans have them, but if policyholders are unlucky enough to stay in the hospital for seven days—a not-unreasonable stay for heart-valve surgery—they could spend more than the \$992 hospital deductible, which (if the copay is \$150–\$200, the typical range) is all they would pay had they stayed in traditional Medicare.

Patients who require a lot of medications lose money for com-

panies and are discovering that some carriers make it hard to access benefits; others change the rules, dropping some benefits altogether. Maureen Doyle of South Weymouth, Massachusetts, listened to the government and advocates who urged her to take advantage of the new drug benefit. But ever since, she has tussled with her insurer, WellCare. Several times last year, WellCare refused to authorize prescription refills. Each time she went to the pharmacy to pick up medicine, she was told she had no coverage. Each time, after numerous phone calls and correspondence, the company admitted a mistake and allowed the prescriptions. "Our government assured us that private insurers would provide the most efficient drug coverage," says Doyle. "The casual, go-to-hell attitude of this private insurer belies this promise." After other problems with WellCare's marketing surfaced this spring, it announced enhanced oversight measures.

With some of the Medicare Advantage plans, seniors may end up paying more out of pocket than they would under traditional Medicare.

Early in the game Humana promoted its "Complete" stand-alone drug plan, which provided brand drug coverage in the so-called doughnut hole, where consumers with high prescription use have no government-subsidized Part D benefit. Humana dropped the brand drug coverage this year. It had underpriced the policy, and too many sick people were hurting the bottom line. Humana customer service representatives contacted thousands of customers who had bought the Complete plan, explained that brand coverage was being cut and suggested they seek similar coverage from a competitor, Sierra Health. Sierra, which is also dropping brand drug coverage in the doughnut hole next year, says that as many as 7,000 of its customers may have come from Humana. Humana spokesman Dick Brown says the company supports "a continuing public-private partnership with Medicare amid mounting evidence that private-sector Medicare plans are the right choice."

State insurance regulators and advocates cite industry marketing abuses. A report issued earlier this year by California Health Advocates and the Medicare Rights Center found that agents had misled beneficiaries about private fee-for-service plans. Although agents told them they could go to any doctor, many have had trouble finding doctors who would accept their coverage. In June seven insurance companies said they would suspend the marketing of private fee-for-service plans until they can prove to Medicare officials that agents understand the policies and their sales materials are accurate, a voluntary move unlikely to hurt the bottom line. Humana released a statement saying the suspension would affect 2007 earnings by no more than 2 cents a share. The move, of course, is a ploy to deflect attention from the real issue of overpayments. Pete Stark, who chairs the House Ways and Means Committee's health subcommittee, said the move "will do virtually nothing to protect Medicare beneficiaries and is a pathetic attempt to pre-empt Congressional action."

The story of Humana is emblematic of a major transition in healthcare, to a more privatized system in which insurance companies can discard policyholders when they are no longer profitable. This raises a question: If the private market doesn't provide long-term, effective and efficient care, why does the government have \$50 billion to subsidize companies while claiming not to have the same \$50 billion to pay for care directly? ■

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CHRISTOPHER SERRA

Andy Stern: Savior or Sellout?

LIZA FEATHERSTONE

When Andy Stern, president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and Lee Scott, CEO of Wal-Mart, appeared onstage together in early May, the pairing drew attention. The occasion was a lunchtime meeting of Better Health Care Together, a coalition of business, labor and political leaders, at a Hilton hotel in New York City. Stern had initiated the coalition with a letter to all the Fortune 500 CEOs inviting them to work with him on a solution to the nation's healthcare crisis. He says he was surprised that Wal-Mart—and so many other companies—responded. “When I write letters to CEOs,” he explains matter-of-factly, “I usually don’t get a response.”

Outside the Hilton, several hundred men and women wearing United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) T-shirts, some of whom had come all the way from Maine and Pennsylvania, picketed the event, objecting to the “hypocrisy” of Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott’s appearance. Scott is accustomed to dodging protesters; his company has been engaged in a bitter public relations battle with the UFCW for years, with the union charging that Wal-Mart routinely violates the right to organize and offers stingy health benefits.

But the Wal-Mart boss wasn’t the only target of righteous ire that day. The union activists were also upset about the presence of Andy Stern. “People feel he has sacrificed some of the basic principles of the labor movement” by appearing onstage with the Wal-Mart CEO, said Pat Purcell, an organizer of the Hilton picket. One of those principles is solidarity. “Our union is losing members every single day because of Wal-Mart,” explains Purcell, director of special projects for UFCW Local 1500. “When we ask for help from other unions, we don’t mean, You can have lunch with them but not dinner!” Though Purcell says he has “great respect” for Stern, he and other unionists feel that Stern

enabled a public relations stunt by Wal-Mart, aimed at making the company look socially responsible.

Inside the Hilton, Stern was more popular. Over a dry repast of chicken, Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell hailed Andy Stern and Lee Scott as “the odd couple of healthcare.” Stern beamed when Arnold Schwarzenegger, who spoke by satellite, thanked him for his “great leadership.”

To be fair, this moment aside, Stern’s relationship with Wal-Mart is hardly chummy. SEIU continues to fund Wal-Mart Watch, an organization dedicated to relentless criticism of the retailer’s practices, and this year the union will allocate more funding than ever to such efforts. In March Stern gave a speech at a Bank of America gathering blasting Wal-Mart for undermining “fair competition” and adopting practices that were “bad for business overall.”

But many in the labor movement view Stern’s overtures to Scott as typical manifestations of his business-friendly unionism, more focused on partnering with employers than on joining other progressives in a struggle against corporate power. Stern’s 2006 book, *A Country That Works*, is full of statements like “employees and employers need organizations that solve problems, not create them” and “all parties want a mutually beneficial relationship based on teamwork.” (Sometimes the business-speak in this book reaches comic proportions; at one point Stern praises civil rights icon Jackie Robinson as “a change agent who endured indignities as a pathbreaker.”) Stern has unsettled many of his staff by publicly suggesting that he might not be against Social Security privatization or school vouchers (one organizer in the Midwest probably speaks for nearly everyone in SEIU in calling such statements “a bunch of horseshit...in fact we *are* against those things”). Paul Krehbiel, an organizer who until recently worked for SEIU Local 660 in Southern California, points out that Stern briefly attended the Wharton business school before becoming a social worker: “Andy’s just doing what he started out doing. He loves the business community!” Rose Ann

Liza Featherstone, a Nation contributing writer, is the author of Selling Women Short: The Landmark Battle for Workers’ Rights at Wal-Mart.

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DeMoro, executive director of the California Nurses Association (which competes with SEIU to organize nurses), bluntly calls Stern “the neocon of the labor movement.”

Many progressives would be startled by DeMoro’s characterization of Andy Stern. His union is the employer of choice for many idealistic college graduates. That’s only in part because the membership of SEIU—African-Americans and immigrants toiling in underpaid jobs—inspires a natural solidarity from the left. It’s also because Stern’s personal style is agreeable to middle-class progressives. The 1960s-generation, University of Pennsylvania-educated former social worker is reflective and contemporary, not macho or swaggering like many old-school union leaders. He’s also willing to try new things, and like many of his generation harbors a profound contempt for stagnant bureaucracy. These attitudes can be refreshing in a labor leader.

Even photo ops with Scott can be attributed to this aspect of his temperament: When Stern is asked about his perceived coziness with business, he is quick to insist that he is pragmatic, often using phrases like “it’s not academic” or “these are real-life choices” to suggest that critics are ideologues or pie-in-the-sky idealists.

Stern is also an internationalist. He’s assigned SEIU staff to Australia, Poland, England, India, France, Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands and South America, with an eye to running global campaigns pressuring multinational employers. As Stern explains in his book, “Imagine simultaneous protests on service contractors’ global clients, or outsourcing strikes to countries where strikes are legal and will not provoke government retaliation.” When SEIU was having trouble organizing American security guards employed by the Swedish firm Securitas, it sought help from the Swedish Transport Workers Union, which had a good relationship with the company. Securitas agreed to drop its opposition to the union drive.

More controversially, Stern has formed relationships with the Chinese state union, which has been criticized for helping the government suppress workers’ rights. Stern, who played a key role in forcing Wal-Mart to allow the union into its Chinese stores, believes that a cold-war approach to China is obsolete. When I interviewed him, he had just returned from his sixth trip to China. “Our members and their members work for the same employers,” he explained. “I just think workers’ solidarity has a lot more possibilities when you’re not dealing with ideology.”

Another reason to cheer for Stern is that in a time of dimly declining union density, SEIU under his leadership has added members and seen some victories, improving the lives of home health aides, janitors and security guards, some of the country’s most exploited workers. In May, for example, 4,000 Los Angeles security guards joined SEIU as part of a nationwide campaign to raise standards in that industry. Ruth Milkman, director of the UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, has called SEIU a “model of dynamic unionism,” pointing out that “no other union has been more effective in organizing the unorganized in recent years.”

But many observers wonder what Stern’s new federation, Change to Win (CTW)—founded with great fanfare when he

led six other unions in a split from the AFL-CIO in September 2005—has thus far accomplished. (“Press releases,” grumbles one internal skeptic. “Where is it headed? is something a lot of people here are asking.”) Milkman, who championed the formation of CTW in articles, op-eds and scholarly work, calls it “a bit early to assess this” but agrees that “it is fair to say that, to date, there is not much to point to in the way of concrete organizing victories that were the work of Change to Win itself.”

Within SEIU most people agree that Stern has been quite successful in implementing what is often referred to by his union’s foot soldiers as “the program”: building density in the union’s three industries, building services—the public sector and (most of all) healthcare. During his tenure, the union has grown by 980,000 workers (some of that growth has come about through mergers, but the “vast majority,” according to SEIU communications director Steve Trossman, are newly organized members).

Stern believes that unions are losing political power—and bargaining power—because they represent a declining share of the population (at present, 12 percent of the workforce and 7 percent of private-sector workers). More controversially, he believes the only way to reverse this sorry state of affairs is to sign up more members by just about any means necessary. Many within SEIU worry that this near-exclusive focus on growth is hampering the union’s ability to serve its existing members; they observe that with more resources directed to organizing, and more emphasis on consolidating small locals into larger organizations, it’s becoming harder for workers to find their union rep or file a simple grievance. If union members don’t feel the union is serving them, organizers say, they begin to ask why they are paying dues. Former SEIU organizer Krehbiel points out that in Stern’s “200 page book, if there was half a page about current dues-paying members, that was quite a bit.” Stern acknowledges the problem, but says, “You can’t be islands of strength in a non-union sea.... The history of the labor movement is that we polish the pearls we have rather than trying to extend what we have to other people.”

Stern is also coming under fire within the labor movement for, as CNA’s De Moro puts it, “organizing corporations, not workers.” Perhaps because Stern’s views on these issues are so public, he’s come to personify an increasingly common phenomenon in unions: a “partnership” approach to employers. Often, this means that companies agree to recognize the union if a majority of workers sign cards (“card check”) in return for concessions from the union that will help boost company profits. Many organizers—inside and outside SEIU—say that workers signed up for union membership in this manner aren’t as committed to the union as those who have won membership themselves, through a fight in which they were personally engaged. This matters especially when the “partnership” sours and the union faces a decertification campaign. Krehbiel acknowledges that workers signed up for SEIU in this way are “better off” than they would be without the union. But, using a metaphor evoked by several other people interviewed for this

Many wonder what Stern’s new federation, Change to Win—founded with great fanfare in September 2005—has accomplished.

article, he said of Stern's emphasis on density, "He's building this huge shell, hoping the size will somehow carry us."

To many others, the idea of post-class-conflict partnership obviates a union's most basic purpose: to defend workers' interests. To DeMoro, Stern's view of a union's role amounts simply to supplying capital with workers—and managing those workers. "To him, the union is just a human resources department," she says. "Or a temp agency." (DeMoro is an outspoken Stern critic. But committed SEIU staff members interviewed for this article—mostly on the condition of anonymity—shared most of her concerns. As if they were working for Wackenhut or Wal-Mart, some were even afraid to communicate using SEIU e-mail addresses or phones.)

But there's an even more controversial aspect to Stern's commitment to "partnerships." In his book, Stern writes that unions should "add value" to companies and assist "employers in overcoming unnecessary legislative and political obstacles to their success." These ideas have played out in recent contracts. Internal memos—obtained by *SF Weekly*—show that two large SEIU locals had made a deal with a group of California nursing homes, in which SEIU agreed that workers would not speak out publicly against abuse of patients, or health code violations, and would lobby for limiting patients' right to sue. (SEIU later backed out of its commitment to tort reform.) In exchange, the union could organize a certain number of nursing homes without interference. The *SF Weekly* story was based in part on an internal report from one of the largest locals involved in the deal, United Healthcare Workers West (UHW-West).

Such deals raise questions about how far unions should go in this vaunted pursuit of density. Many wonder if it is wise in the long run to act against progressive ideals in order to win new members. Working against patients' rights could, after all, alienate natural allies. Backroom moves like this also undermine the union's efforts to emphasize common interests among healthcare workers and patients. In June SEIU launched SEIU Healthcare, which will push for reforms like improved nursing staff–patient ratios and more training for nurses, changes that would be in the interest of members and would also, as SEIU's Steve Trossman is quick to point out, "improve the quality of care."

When I asked Andy Stern about the deal discussed in the UHW-West memo and the *SF Weekly* article, his response was strange and contradictory. He at once questioned whether SEIU had in fact made such a deal, claimed he wasn't familiar with the details and blamed the local. (Much of the criticism of the nursing home deals—inside and outside SEIU—has been directed personally toward Stern, and it is clear from some UHW internal documents that the local holds the international at least partly responsible.) Stern admitted that sacrificing principles for growth is a danger in partnership deals but pointed to the complexity of organizing in today's workplace: "Here's the question we face. Ninety percent of nursing home workers in this country live pretty much in poverty. Don't have unions. Don't have health-care. All of our activities to date to solve that part of the prob-

lem have not worked. So every day, nursing home workers go to work and they're poor." To some organizing in the SEIU trenches, their boss's realism resonates—to a point. "We've negotiated some really shitty contracts," says one staff member. "Sometimes you have no choice—you just keep trying to build density and hope you build enough power to get a better deal next time." But even this veteran of labor realpolitik said he was surprised by the California contract: "The tort reform is *bad!*"

What's more, Stern's business-friendly orientation appears to influence his approach to national policy questions. More problematic than the photo-ops with Lee Scott, Stern's crusade for "healthcare reform" is vague ("not even an inch deep," according to one SEIU researcher). His support for any sort of change has been promiscuous: He's praised Mitt Romney's Massachusetts plan and Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposal in California, which

have been criticized as giveaways to the insurance industry and don't adequately address affordability or cost issues. Asked if the Better Health Care Together Coalition

has agreed on anything more than the fact that there is a problem, Stern says, "That's probably all we will agree on." Of a single-payer system, Stern said in a speech given at the Brookings Institution, "I think we need to find a new system that is not built on the back of the government. I am here to also say I don't think we need to import Canada or any other system." One SEIU staff member says sadly of such comments, Stern "doesn't hold social democracy in high regard."

Stern is not oblivious to the suffering caused by health insurance companies denying care—a problem that none of the incremental plans he supports can address. But to him, the problem of insuring the uninsured is the paramount moral question: "It's a question of, How are we going to get everybody covered?" Then, Stern thinks, something more like a single-payer system will be more politically palatable: "Once we have everybody covered we're going to realize there are more efficient ways and less efficient ways. More costly and less costly ways to do it."

Stern's views on this are significant because several other major labor unions and other progressive groups—buoyed by Michael Moore's new movie—have been campaigning to pass single-payer healthcare in California. SB 840, written by State Senator Sheila Kuehl, passed the State Senate, 23 to 15, in early June and is headed to the Assembly. Given the tremendous public interest in and the widespread frustration with the current system, many activists think we have the best opportunity in years for comprehensive reform. Stern's lack of enthusiasm for single-payer healthcare is one of the main reasons the California Nurses Association, a longtime independent union, joined the AFL-CIO this year when that federation agreed to support single-payer. Explaining why it is so important that unions work toward this goal, CNA's DeMoro, whose union is leading the California fight, explains, "There has never [in any country] been a single-payer healthcare system without the labor movement."

To the CNA, Stern's refusal to put his political weight behind single-payer is unconscionable. "The single biggest obstacle to single-payer healthcare in this country," says Michael Lighty, CNA's policy director, "is Andy Stern." I laugh at this, thinking

Stern has been promiscuous on healthcare policy, paying lip service to single-payer but refusing to put his political weight behind it.

of a few others (the insurance industry and American individualist, anti-government ideology, to name a couple). But DeMoro clarifies her colleague's point with an analysis of the current fight in California: Stern "is the biggest obstacle to moving the Dems, because he gives them cover to do nothing."

However, when asked about single-payer, Stern insists he's not against it: "We supported Howard Dean, and he was for single-payer." (In fact, when Dean ran for President, he said he would not propose such a system, because it wouldn't pass Congress. He also said, "I do not believe in free healthcare or free anything.... If you want to totally reform the healthcare system, I'm not your guy.") More significant, Stern claims that in California SEIU has been lobbying for Sheila Kuehl's bill and expects to support some version of the governor's as well. Indeed, besides the CNA, he boasts, SEIU is "probably the leading supporter" of the single-payer bill. Those involved in pushing for that bill in Sacramento were, to put it mildly, surprised by this contention (reactions ranged from "outrageous" to "bullshit—absolutely not!"). SEIU has turned out members to some hearings in support of the bill but has not otherwise been active in the fight. Yet Stern's statement is, in a Clintonian way, true: SEIU has formally endorsed SB 840 and is one of the largest organizations to do so.

Nationally, Stern says, SEIU is supporting a single-payer "Expanded and Improved Medicare for All" bill introduced by Representative John Conyers, in addition to several other healthcare proposals moving through Congress. Defending his strategy of lobbying for multiple, often conflicting, reforms, Stern is (almost) self-deprecating: "People at the Brookings Institution joke, Next month we're going to have four different proposals about universal healthcare and Andy Stern's going to be supporting all four." To justify his support of tepid reforms, Stern tells me several

heartbreaking stories about people he has met who have no healthcare, including a man in Minnesota who sat with his wife at the kitchen table and decided which of their kids was least likely to get sick, since they couldn't afford to insure all of them. Of the Massachusetts plan, Stern argues, "People are working now, through a political process, particularly now that we have a new governor there, to make it better. Most states have nothing to make better. Is it better to be in Massachusetts with someone trying to make it better, or waiting for California to pass single-payer? I don't know." He adds defensively, "We are not going to let the perfect become the enemy of the good on this issue."

Within SEIU, the rumor mill hums with speculation that Andy Stern has ambitions beyond the union. Certainly, some of his rhetoric and triangulation make him sound like a politician, but Stern denies any plans to step down from SEIU or seek public office.

Labor dissidents can denounce him as a sellout, and of course some will. But they could also read Andy Stern as a sign of the times. When Stern makes compromises that cause fellow progressives and unionists to cringe, it's because he doesn't think there are other ways for the labor movement to grow. He speaks of unions "adding value" to corporate enterprises and crusades for dubious, middle-of-the-road reforms because he doesn't think there is any other language, or any other ideas, that will resonate with Washington policy-makers. An effective grassroots movement for social democracy could change that. The rumblings of discontent within SEIU—and the growing movement for real healthcare reform in California—may be hopeful signs. Stern is a close reader of the zeitgeist. As Rose Ann DeMoro says, "If he sees the tide is turning, he'll change." ■

PETER MORGAN'S NEW PLAY PLACES COMMERCIAL APPEAL OVER HISTORICAL TRUTH.

Nixon's Broadway Revival

ELIZABETH DREW

Frost/Nixon, the hot play in New York, makes for a highly enjoyable evening at the theater. The lead characters, famed talk-show host David Frost (Michael Sheen) and the exiled and disgraced Richard Nixon (Frank Langella, recently awarded a Tony), are wonderfully acted; the staging is simple but effective; there is a clear plotline with a dramatic ending.

But the play, the talented Peter Morgan's dramatization of Frost's wildly popular series of televised interviews, in 1977, with the former President, profoundly misleads as it entertains. Langella's Nixon is not the Richard Nixon of history, and the ending significantly alters what actually happened. It doesn't always matter when



entertainment collides with history—but in this case it does.

The way these extraordinary interviews came about is accurately set forth: Frost, faced with a career on the skids, has the wit and the nerve to persuade Nixon, through Hollywood superagent Irving "Swifty" Lazar, to grant him a series of interviews, to be aired on an international syndicate of stations. Nixon, his reputation in ruins and facing large legal debts, agrees. After lengthy negotiations, Nixon received a then-whopping \$600,000, plus 20 percent of the profits from selling the interviews. (The contract also stipulated that no more than 25 percent of the time could be devoted to Watergate.) Thus, Nixon and Frost were in business together, and they had the same goals—to restore their respective standings and, in Nixon's case, to make money. Frost, a Brit presuma-

Elizabeth Drew is a Washington journalist and author. Her latest book, Richard M. Nixon, was recently published by Times Books.

bly lacking deep knowledge of American politics, was just the instrument Nixon needed for his methodical and relentless effort to regain respectability—to be viewed as an elder statesman. Frost (a far cleverer man than portrayed) was useful because he was essentially an entertainer with scant experience as a hard-nosed interviewer.

The difficulties begin almost from the opening moments of the play. The first problem is that Nixon comes across as an expansive, witty, likable man for whom the audience ends up rooting. Langella, an accomplished ham, has Nixon's voice, walk, shaking jowls and posture (hunched shoulders, body slightly bent forward, arms hanging at his side somewhat ape-like) dead-on, and before long, he convinces us that he *is* Nixon. In a nice touch, Langella/Nixon even rubs his leg occasionally, before the audience is told he suffers from phlebitis.

Yet the play transforms brooding, tormented, often angry, extremely introverted and socially awkward Nixon into a figure who readily and humorously, if still somewhat clumsily, chats with Frost between takes in the interviews. Langella's Nixon is a lot of fun. The real Nixon did try to banter with interviewers, but he was virtually incapable of small talk and was not known for his humor. Though the play does give the audience whiffs of Nixon's remnant anger and bitterness, particularly toward those who'd been born to privilege, it lightens up his dark nature and presents a Nixon who never was. The real Nixon was riveting enough, and would have made for gripping drama, if perhaps a less amusing evening. So sympathetic a figure has Morgan/Langella made Nixon that when he utters the chilling line, "When the President does it, that means it's not illegal," the audience laughs.

The next problem is the incompleteness of what the play covers. While this reflects the actual interviews, the larger picture becomes increasingly necessary as memories fade and the number of people who did not experience this period keeps growing. It would have been helpful if Morgan had given the audience more context. Frost's Watergate interview covers only Nixon's role in the cover-up of the famous break-in of the Democratic Party's headquarters. Nixon's broad-scale and alarming assaults on the Constitution are absent. For example, the break-in of the office of Dr. Lewis Fielding, psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers—the discovery of which Nixon was far more worried about—goes unmentioned. Also omitted is the extent to which this country was governed by an out-of-control President, as in, drunk on the eve of the invasion of Cambodia and taking other irrational actions—ordering up worldwide nuclear alerts, or instructing aides to firebomb the liberal-leaning Brookings Institution, where he thought some secret papers had been stashed (they hadn't been), or using the instruments of government against his perceived enemies. (In the case of Brookings, his aides, who constantly had to decide whether their boss's orders were mad or even intended, thought the wiser of it.) The play makes a dramatic turning point of a Frost researcher's discovery of a taped conversation between Nixon and his chief henchman, Charles Colson, which suggests that Nixon was in on the cover-up early. But the reason the tape

was unknown was that the Watergate prosecutors, awash in far more incriminating evidence, didn't consider it worth using.

The final difficulty with the play is that although it contains various details that are harmless elaborations on facts, or simply imagined, the plot's very premise—that the shallow showman Frost goes up against the disgraced but canny Nixon and "nails" him on Watergate—is a contrivance. The real interview did elicit some important and memorable statements, and a bit of groveling by Nixon, but, though it made for compelling television, it was no "knockout."

Ample evidence exists that Nixon said precisely what he wanted to in order to help Frost sell the interviews. In actuality, during a break in taping (also misrepresented in the play), a Nixon aide, after conferring with Nixon, told Frost's aides, "He knows he has to go further.... He's got more to volunteer."

This line is not in the play.

The play imagines Nixon in the dressing room saying, "I'm tired.... He's good today" and commenting that he does not want to "carry on

denying it all." But there's little evidence from what followed in the interview that Nixon had opted for full candor. According to other accounts of these interviews, when the taping of the Watergate session was over, Nixon remarked to Frost, half-smiling, "Well, that should make you happy." (This is not in the play.) Morgan himself told John Lahr of *The New Yorker*, "I could just as easily have written the piece—and found substance to support it—to substantiate the idea that Frost didn't get Nixon, that Nixon half threw it, in order for these interviews to sell."

As in the real interviews, Nixon dominates most of the segments through rambling reminiscences, to Frost's and his advisers' despair. Then, during the Watergate segment, the last, the well-prepared Frost presses Nixon hard, and Nixon says some gripping lines—during which the play shows Langella's ravaged, swollen face contorted with anger and agony on the television screens clustered in the back of the set. On the recording of the actual interview, Nixon looks uncomfortable, his eyes glowering at times, but far less rattled than as portrayed in the play. Other problems are caused by the playwright's fiddling with what Nixon said in the interview. The most egregious emendation in the script has Nixon confessing that he "...was involved in a 'cover-up' as you call it." The ellipsis, which is unknown to the audience, is crucial: What Nixon actually said was, "You're wanting me to say that I participated in a legal cover-up. No!"

In the interviews (and as accurately depicted in the play), Nixon gives a semi-confession that "a reasonable person could call that a cover-up," but Nixon quickly recoups and says, "I didn't intend it to cover up," and he insists that he had no corrupt motive. Nixon famously says that his mistakes were "mistakes of the heart rather than the head." Although he admits that he had abused power, most of those abuses for which he was about to be impeached and convicted when he resigned go unmentioned. Both Nixon and Frost were ultimately successful in achieving their mutual goals: the interviews attracted a huge worldwide audience, and Frost's career and Nixon's rehabilitation effort were enhanced considerably.

The plot's very premise—that the shallow Frost goes up against the canny Nixon and nails him on Watergate—is a contrivance.

Morgan specializes in dramas that pit two figures against each other and explore the psychology and tensions of the relationship, usually with the good guy prevailing. Among his earlier successes were *The Last King of Scotland*, about Idi Amin and a naïve, idealistic Scottish doctor, and *The Queen*, in which Prime Minister Tony Blair (also played by Sheen) tries to persuade an out-of-touch monarch to show empathy toward her subjects' grief at the tragic death of Princess Diana. In this movie, Queen Elizabeth's conversion occurs in an improbable scene and overworked metaphor in which she sees a beautiful stag about to be killed by hunters, bringing tears to her eyes. But whether or not this literally happened doesn't matter. The movie doesn't distort history in large ways, and

the figures Blair and Elizabeth are true to themselves.

Frost/Nixon is different. It goes over the line in placing commercial appeal over historical truth. Innumerable plays, as well as movies, elaborate on what is known (Shakespeare was the genius at this), and when dramatists and screenwriters base their work on historical events or figures, they are granted large license. But we do expect the dramas about them to be essentially true to history. *Frost/Nixon* is not. It matters a lot because this popular drama is about a relatively recent figure whose historical role is still the subject of vigorous debate, in which Nixon defenders argue that his fate was undeserved. In that sense, the play is propaganda, perhaps inadvertent but effective and powerful nonetheless. ■

MAOIST GUERRILLAS HAVE FOUND A RECEPTIVE AUDIENCE IN THE TRIBAL HEARTLAND.

A War in the Heart of India

RAMACHANDRA GUHA

In the history of independent India, the most bloody conflicts have taken place in the most beautiful locations. Consider Kashmir, whose enchantments have been celebrated by countless poets down the ages, as well as by rulers from the Mughal Emperor Jahangir to the first prime minister of free India, Jawaharlal Nehru. Or Nagaland and Manipur, whose mist-filled hills and valleys have been rocked again and again by the sound of gunfire.

To this melancholy list of lovely places wracked by civil war must now be added Bastar, a hilly, densely forested part of central India largely inhabited by tribal people. In British times Bastar was an autonomous princely state, overseen with a gentle hand by its ruler, the representative on earth—so his subjects believed—of the goddess Durga. After independence, it came to form part of the state of Madhya Pradesh and, when that state was bifurcated in 1998, of Chattisgarh (a name that means “thirty-six forts,” presumably a reference to structures once maintained by medieval rulers).

The forts that dot Chattisgarh now take the form of police camps run by the modern, and professedly democratic, Republic of India. For the state is at the epicenter of a war being waged between the government and Maoist guerrillas. And within Chattisgarh, the battle rages most fiercely in Bastar.

The conflict in Bastar and its neighborhood get little play in the Indian press, which is both urban-centered and self-congratulatory, flying, as it were, from Delhi to Bangalore and back again—from the center of power and patronage to the center of India's booming software industry. To get to Bangalore from Delhi one must pass over Bastar, literally, for obscured from the airplane in the sky are the bloody battles taking place on the



CHRISTOPHER SERRA

ground. Other sections of the Indian Establishment likewise ignore or underrate the Maoist challenge, although an exception must be made for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who recently identified it as the “biggest internal security threat” facing the nation.

In recent years the Maoists have mounted a series of bold attacks on symbols of the Indian state. In November 2005 they stormed the district town of Jehanabad in Bihar, firebombing offices and freeing several hundred prisoners from the jail. Then, this past March, they attacked a police camp in Chattisgarh, killing fifty-five policemen and making off with a huge cache of weapons. At other times, they have bombed and set fire to railway stations and transmission towers.

The Indian Maoists are referred to by friend and foe alike as Naxalites, after the village of Naxalbari in north Bengal, where their movement began in 1967. Through the 1970s and '80s, the Naxalites were episodically active in the Indian countryside. They were strongest in the states of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, where they organized low-caste sharecroppers and laborers to demand better terms from their upper-caste landlords. Naxalite activities were open, as when conducted through labor unions, or illegal, as when they assassinated a particularly recalcitrant landlord or made a daring seizure of arms from a police camp.

Until the 1990s the Naxalites were a marginal presence in Indian politics. But in that decade they began working more closely with the tribal communities of the Indian heartland. About 80 million Indians are officially recognized as “tribal”; of these, some 15 million live in the northeast, in regions untouched by Hindu influence. It is among the 65 million tribals of the heartland that the Maoists have found a most receptive audience.

Who, exactly, are the Indian tribals? There is a long-running dispute on this question. Some, like the great French anthropologist Marcel Mauss, merely saw them as “Hindus lost in the

Ramachandra Guha's *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* will be published by Ecco/HarperCollins in July.

forest”; others, like the British ethnographer Verrier Elwin, insisted that they could not be so easily assimilated into the mainstream of the Indic civilization. While the arguments about their cultural distinctiveness (or lack thereof) continue, there is—or at any rate should be—a consensus on their economic and political status in independent India.

On the economic side, the tribals are the most deeply disadvantaged segment of Indian society. As few as 23 percent of them are literate; as many as 50 percent live under the poverty line. The state fails to provide them with adequate education, healthcare or sanitation; more actively, it works to dispossess them of their land and resources. For the tribals have the ill luck to live amid India’s most verdant forests, alongside India’s freest-flowing rivers and atop India’s most valuable minerals. As these resources have gained in market value, the tribals have had to make way for commercial forestry, large and small dams, and mines. According to sociologist Walter Fernandes, 40 percent of those displaced by development projects are tribals, although they constitute less than 8 percent of the population. Put another way, a tribal is five times as likely as a nontribal to have his property seized by the state.

On the political side, the tribals are very poorly represented in the democratic process. In fact, compared with India’s other subaltern groups, such as the Dalits (former Untouchables) and the Muslims, they are well nigh invisible. Dalits have their own, sometimes very successful, political parties; the Muslims have always constituted a crucial vote bank for the dominant Congress Party. In consequence, in every Indian Cabinet since independence, Dalits and Muslims have been assigned powerful portfolios such as Home, Education, External Affairs and Law. On the other hand, tribals are typically allotted inconsequential ministries such as Sports or Youth Affairs. Again, two Muslims and one Dalit have been chosen President of India, but no tribal. Two Muslims and one Dalit have served as Chief Justice of India, but no tribal.

This twin marginalization, economic and political, has opened a space for the Maoists to work in. Their most impressive gains have been in tribal districts, where they have shrewdly stoked discontent with the state to win people to their side. They have organized tribals to demand better wages from the forest department, killed or beaten up policemen alleged to have intimidated tribals and run law courts and irrigation schemes of their own.

The growing presence of Maoists in tribal India is also explained by geography. In these remote upland areas, the officials of the Indian state are unwilling to work hard, and are often unwilling to work at all. Doctors do not attend hospital; schoolteachers stay away from school; magistrates spend their time lobbying for a transfer back to the plains. On the other side, the Maoists are prepared to walk miles to hold a village meeting, and to pitch camp in the forest and live off its bounty. It is from the jungle that they emerge to preach to the tribals, and it is to the jungle that they return when a police party approaches.

To combat the Maoists, the state has set up local militias—but their depredations have only enraged the local population.

Last summer I traveled with a group of colleagues through Bastar to study the impact of a new, state-sponsored initiative to combat Maoism. Known as Salwa Judum (a term that translates, ironically, as “peace campaign”), the scheme had armed hundreds of local villagers and given some the elevated title of Special Police Officer (SPO). While the state claimed Salwa Judum to be a success, other reports suggested that its activists were a law unto themselves, burning villages deemed insufficiently sympathetic to them and abusing their women.

The first thing I found I knew already from travelogues: that the landscape of Bastar is gorgeous. The winding roads we drove and walked on went up and down. Hills loomed in the distance. The vegetation was very lush: wild mango, jackfruit, sal and teak, among other indigenous species. The forest was broken up with patches of grassland. Even in late May the terrain was very green.

The bird life was as rich and as native as the vegetation—warblers and wagtails on the ground, the brainfever bird and the Indian cuckoo calling overhead.

The scenery was hauntingly beautiful and utterly desolate. Evidence of the former lay before our eyes; evidence of the latter, in the testimonies of those we met and interviewed. As a means of saving Bastar from the Maoists, the Salwa Judum and the state administration have uprooted more than 40,000 villagers and placed them in camps along the road, recalling the failed “strategic hamlets” used by the US military in South Vietnam more than forty years ago. While some tribals came voluntarily, many others came out of fear of the administration and the goons commissioned to work with it. Whether refugee or displacee, they live in primitive conditions—in tents made of plastic sheets strung up on bamboo poles, open on three sides to the elements. Some permanent houses have been built, but these are inappropriate to the climate and context, being small and dark, with asbestos roofs. Worse, the residents of the camps have been given no means of livelihood. Once independent farmers, hunters and gatherers, they now had to make do with the pickings that came from coolie labor. In the camps we visited, the men wore sad, simple *lungis* and *banyans*; the women, crumpled and torn saris; the children, sometimes nothing at all.

Moving away from the camps into the villages off the road, we found evidence of depredations by vigilante groups. In one hamlet we photographed ten homes burned by a Salwa Judum mob. This village lay close to a hill where Maoists were said to sleep by day; the villagers were alleged to sometimes give them refuge at night. Among these tribals the feelings against the Salwa Judum ran very high. Before a clump of mahua trees with golden orioles calling in the background, a tribal woman demonstrated the humiliations she was subjected to. The men were equally bitter—wishing to live quietly in their homes, but forced to report to a nearby camp and spend the nights there.

On the other side, the Maoists had made a particular target of the freshly recruited SPOs. In one especially gruesome incident, the guerrillas kidnapped fifty villagers, some of them Salwa Judum members. They later set thirty-seven free, but killed the thirteen identified as SPOs. Maoists also attacked village headmen and village council representatives, whom

they consider part of the bourgeois political system.

The armed officials of the state, we found, patrol only in the daytime and mostly along the roads. Bunkered in their stations, they are mainly interested in protecting themselves. Meanwhile, Salwa Judum has been given a free hand. A local journalist summed up the attitude of the police as follows: "Let the villagers fight it out among themselves while we stay safe."

According to the Asian Centre for Human Rights, close to 400 people were killed in the civil war in Bastar last year. Of these, about fifty were security personnel; about a hundred, Naxalites or alleged Naxalites; the rest, civilians caught in the cross-fire.

Bastar forms part of a contiguous forest belt that spills over from Chattisgarh into Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. In the Ramayana epic this region is known as Dandakaranya, a name the Maoists have integrated into their lexicon. They have a Special Zonal Committee for Dandakaranya, under which operate several divisional committees. These in turn have range committees reporting to them. The lowest level of organization is at the village, where committees known as *sangams* are formed.

We got a sharp insight into the Maoist mind in an extended interview with a Maoist senior leader. He met our team, by arrangement, in a small wayside cafe along the road that runs from the state capital, Raipur, to Jagdalpur, once the seat of the Maharaja of Bastar. There he told us of his party's strategies for Bastar, and for the country as a whole.

Working under the pseudonym "Sanjeev," this revolutionary was slim, clean-shaven and soberly dressed in dark trousers and a bush shirt of neutral colors. Now 35, he had been in the movement for two decades, dropping out of college in Hyderabad to join it. He works in Abujmarh, a part of Bastar so isolated that it remains unsurveyed (apparently the only part of India that holds this distinction), and where no official dares venture for fear of being killed.

Speaking in quiet, controlled tones, Sanjeev showed himself to be deeply committed as well as highly sophisticated. The Naxalite village committees, he said, worked to protect people's rights in *jal*, *jangal* and *zameen*—water, forest and land. At the same time, they made targeted attacks on state officials, especially the police. Raids on police stations were intended to stop police from harassing ordinary folk. They were also necessary to augment the weaponry of the guerrilla army. Through popular mobilization and the intimidation of state officials, the Maoists hoped to expand their authority over Dandakaranya. Once the region was made a "liberated zone," it would be used as a launch pad for the capture of state power in India as a whole.

Sanjeev's belief in the efficacy of armed struggle was complete. When asked about two landmine blasts that had killed many innocent people—in one case members of a marriage party—he said that these had been mistakes, with the guerrillas believing that the police had hired private vehicles to escape detection. The Maoists, he said, would issue an apology and compensate the victims' families. However, when asked about other, scarcely less brutal killings, he said they were "deliberate incidents."

We asked Sanjeev what he thought of the Maoists in neighboring Nepal, who had laid down their arms and joined other parties in the framing of a republican Constitution. He was emphatic that in India they did not countenance this option. Here, they remained committed to the destruction of the state by means of armed struggle.

How many Maoists are there in India? Estimates vary widely. There are perhaps 10,000 to 20,000 full-time guerrillas, each armed with an AK-47, most of them conversant with the use of grenades, many with landmines, a few with rocket launchers. They maintain links with guerrilla movements in other parts of South Asia, exchanging information and technology with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and, at least before their recent conversion, the Nepali Maoists.

The Indian Maoists got a huge shot in the arm with the merger, in 2004, of two major factions. One, the People's War Group, was active in Andhra Pradesh; the other, the Maoist Coordination Committee, in Bihar. Both dissolved themselves into the new Communist Party of India (Maoist). Since the merger

the party has spread rapidly, with former PWG cadres moving north into the tribal heartland from Andhra, and erstwhile MCC cadres coming south from Bihar.

Through popular mobilization and intimidation of officials, the rebels hope to expand their authority and create a 'liberated zone.'

The general secretary of the united party calls himself "Ganapathi," almost certainly a pseudonym. Statements carrying his name occasionally circulate on the Internet—one, issued in February, reported the successful completion of a party congress "held deep in the forests of one of the several Guerrilla Zones in the country." The congress "reaffirmed the general line of the new democratic revolution with agrarian revolution as its axis and protracted people's war as the path of the Indian revolution." The meeting "was completed amongst great euphoria with a Call to the world people: Rise up as a tide to smash imperialism and its running dogs! Advance the Revolutionary war throughout the world!!"

Ganapathi is the elephant-headed son of Shiva, a god widely revered in South India. The general secretary is most likely from Andhra Pradesh. What we know of the other leaders suggests that they come from a lower-middle-class background. Like Sanjeev, they usually have a smattering of education and were radicalized in college. Like other Communist movements, the Naxalite leadership is overwhelmingly male. No tribals are represented in the upper levels of the party hierarchy.

How influential is the Maoist movement in India? Once more, the estimates vary widely. The Home Ministry claims that one-third of all districts in India, or about 150 in all, are recognized as "Naxalite affected." But this, as the Home Minister himself recently admitted, is a considerable exaggeration. State governments have a vested interest in declaring districts Naxalite-affected, for it allows them to claim a subsidy from the center. Thus, an armed robbery or two is sometimes enough for a district to be featured on the list.

My guess is that about forty districts, spread across ten states and containing perhaps 80 million Indians, live in a liminal zone where the Indian state exercises uncertain control by day and no control by night. Some of these districts are in the northeast,

where the nighttime rulers are the Naga, Assamese and Manipuri rebels. The other districts are in the peninsula, where Naxalites have dug deep roots among low castes and tribals grievously shortchanged by the democratic system.

How, finally, might the Maoist insurgency be ended or at least contained? On the Maoist side this might take the shape of a compact with bourgeois democracy, by participating in and perhaps even winning elections. On the government side it might take the shape of a sensitively conceived and sincerely implemented plan to make tribals true partners in the development process: by assuring them the title on lands they cultivate, allowing them the right to manage forests sustainably, giving them a solid stake in industrial or mining projects that come up where they live and that often cost them their homes.

In truth, the one is as unlikely as the other. One cannot easily see the Maoists giving up on their commitment to armed struggle.

Nor, given the way the Indian state actually functions, can one see it so radically reform itself as to put the interests of a vulnerable minority, the tribals, ahead of those with more money and power.

In the long run, perhaps, the Maoists might indeed make their peace with the Republic of India, and the Republic come to treat its tribal citizens with dignity and honor. Whether this denouement will happen in my lifetime, I am not sure. In the forest regions of central and eastern India, years of struggle and strife lie ahead. Here in the jungles and hills they once called their own, the tribals find themselves harassed on one side by the state and on the other by the insurgents. Speaking in Hindi, a tribal in Bastar told me, "Hummé dono taraf sé dabav hain, aur hum beech mé pis gayé hain." It sounds far tamer in English—"Pressed and pierced from both sides, here we are, squeezed in the middle." ■

THE NEW TIMES TAKEOVER IS GUTTING THE WEST COAST'S FINEST PROGRESSIVE PAPER.

End of an Era at the *LA Weekly*

JON WIENER

It's the other media takeover story in Los Angeles—not the Tribune Company buying the *Los Angeles Times*, cutting staff, losing hundreds of thousands of readers and firing an editor and publisher in the past two years but the little-known drama surrounding the city's immensely successful alternative paper, the *LA Weekly*. When the *Weekly* was bought by New Times Media from Village Voice Media in 2005 for \$400 million (along with five other alternative papers), a wave of anxiety hit LA's progressive politicians and journalists. The *Weekly*—a fat 200 pages, circulation 208,000, largest of any urban weekly in the West—has been a voice of the left for its nearly thirty-year history. It has been truly great among alternative weeklies, with news coverage and political writing that towered above its counterparts—including the *Village Voice* and the eleven metro weeklies owned by the Phoenix-based New Times chain. New Times executive editor Michael Lacey is often described as apolitical, but he has frequently declared disdain for liberals with causes.

The changes at the *LA Weekly* in the past six months have been dramatic: virtually no more writing about the war in Iraq or other international or national news topics, no more endorsements of candidates in elections and no more stories about the forces trying to make LA a more egalitarian and less polarized city. (Alert to readers: The *Weekly* has published my work and also rejected submissions of mine; it's reviewed me, and I've reviewed for it; I have friends who have worked there and friends who still do, including Marc Cooper,



a *Nation* contributing editor.)

First, international coverage, including Iraq: The old *LA Weekly* engaged national and world issues every week, but the New Times strategy is relentlessly local. "That's a huge change," says Kevin Roderick, who writes the authoritative news and media-watch website LAObserved.com. A web search in late May for "war in Iraq" in the *LA Weekly* news pages turns up a total of three pieces published in the past three months, out of more than a hundred articles.

There was a time when the alt weeklies sent writers around the world: When *Weekly* staff writer Marc Cooper was at the *Voice* in the 1980s and '90s, it sent him to cover the Sandinistas' Nicaragua, the invasion of Panama, the first Gulf War and Yeltsin's Russia. At the *Weekly* all such reporting is gone. In its place the paper focuses on what Tim Rutten, media columnist for the *LA Times*, calls "hyper-localism—it's the prevailing commercial wisdom regarding all newspapers." But there's plenty of evidence that LA readers are as interested in what's going on in Baghdad as in Beverly Hills. "This is the business model that failed in the alt-press model here in LA," Rutten points out. "It was tried in its purest form in *New Times LA*"—which Lacey published from 1996 to 2002—"and the *Weekly* ran them out of town. Now we're going to try it again and see if it works in a monopoly situation."

The second big change: With the New Times takeover, the *Weekly* has stopped endorsing candidates. "That's huge," Roderick said. Endorsements had been a central focus since the paper's founding. An astounding editorial effort went into interviewing candidates, and the paper devoted a whopping 7,500 words to endorsements in the June 2006 primary. Those endorsements

Jon Wiener, a *Nation* contributing editor, teaches history at the University of California, Irvine, and is the author of *Historians in Trouble*.

provided a crucial counterweight to the more centrist *LA Times* editorial page picks. The *Weekly's* endorsements expressed the editors' belief that the paper was an important political and journalistic institution with a responsibility to readers and to the broader community interest. The mentality of Lacey & Co. seems to be exactly the opposite: The paper exists to make money and has no moral or political commitment to Los Angeles.

The third change, the big editorial shift to the right, was explained by Harold Meyerson, who had been a top editor and columnist before he was eased out last October. "The city's biggest problem was the erosion of the middle class and the creation of a huge class of full-time workers who were still poor," he told me. "That's why we covered unions and plant closings and Justice for Janitors and the Living Wage campaign. The affluent West Side needed to know what LA had become—and how it could be fixed." Now that focus is gone. In its place the *Weekly* features gotcha-style hit pieces targeting the city's elite, left and right, without any larger perspective on the possible futures of LA. The one exception: Marc Cooper's column in May describing how, fifteen years after the Rodney King riots, "L.A. is still divided between served and servers."

The most dramatic example of this editorial shift came on May 1, when the LAPD rioted in MacArthur Park, attacking an immigration rights rally. Six hundred cops fired more than 100 "nonlethal" projectiles into a crowd of families and charged with clubs swinging, injuring forty-two, including several members of the mainstream media. The story made front pages around the world and dominated local news for a week. The old *Weekly* would have been all over it, but the next issue of the new *Weekly* contained one small, 330-word piece on the event while devoting six articles and 3,700 words to the Coachella music festival.

The key moment in the paper's shift to the right came last October, when the *Weekly* appeared with a cover story reeking of tabloid sleaze. The article was about Miguel Contreras, a brilliant strategist and a charismatic movement leader who had headed the County Federation of Labor and had died the previous year. According to the *Weekly*, he collapsed in a South Central botanica (a purveyor of alternative medicine) that was later raided by the LAPD vice squad as a front for prostitution. The *Weekly* had never run that kind of piece before, but it was exactly the type of story the New Times favored: investigative hit pieces that target local bigwigs.

"I thought the Contreras piece was legit to do," Kevin Roderick told me, "especially the focus on local officials trying to hide what went on." Staff writer David Zahniser argued that it was the same kind of piece as the stories revealing Martin Luther King Jr.'s extramarital affairs. Meyerson, who said the article should have been headlined LABOR BOSS CROAKS IN HOOKER'S ARMS, replied in an open letter to the staff that circulated widely on the web, "There's a crucial difference. King's private life had public consequences: the FBI monitored it and threatened King with exposure. But we're not covering Miguel's private life; we're covering his private death, and it's hard for me to see how the circumstances of his death had public consequences."

*Mike Lacey's New Times chain has also
driven top talent away from the LA Weekly's
sister publication, the OC Weekly.*

Will Swaim was editor of the *Weekly's* sister publication in Orange County, the *OC Weekly*, before he resigned in January. I asked him whether he would have run the story on Contreras's death. "No," he replied. "Because Miguel Contreras had not made an issue of anybody's sex life. When [former Congressman] Bob Dornan claimed he was a family values guy, and we discovered he beat his wife, that was news—because *he* made it news." (Swaim is a friend and former student.) Tim Rutten of the *LA Times* said, "The story had no bounce. There are reasons for that, and they don't have to do with deference toward the power structure. Nobody else thought it was a story."

The "Miguel story," as it's now known, came out the same week Meyerson departed and the week before Jill Stewart was named news editor. She had been a freelance columnist and Schwarzenegger enthusiast whose website makes the unlikely claim that she is "the most influential journalist in Los Angeles." Stewart made her name in the late 1990s at Mike Lacey's *New Times LA* with an over-the-top attack

on Mike Davis for errors in the footnotes to his book *Ecology of Fear* (see Wiener, "LA Story: Backlash of the Boosters," February 22, 1999). "She's polarizing," Roderick argued. "She has a lot of fans—and a lot of people who see her reporting as not trustworthy and politically biased from the right."

The pattern seemed clear: Kicking out Meyerson and bringing in Stewart indicated the *Weekly* was taking a sharp turn away from the left. Meyerson was not just a columnist. He had been executive editor for twelve years, starting in 1989, then—after moving to Washington in 2001 to edit *The American Prospect*—continued at the *Weekly* as political editor, then editor at large. When I asked Stewart whether her arrival signaled a political change, she replied, "I find that topic utterly boring and backward-looking." Editor in chief Laurie Ochoa told me, "At a time when I was facing large budget cuts and trying to save as many staff jobs as possible, I made the decision to discontinue Harold's column in favor of writers whose first priority was the *LA Weekly*." But the paper isn't run to save staff jobs; it's run for readers to read, and cutting Meyerson meant cutting the columnist who had done the most to spotlight LA's progressive movements. His writing about the Latino-labor alliance was clearly incompatible with Lacey's agenda.

When I asked Ochoa about the political shifts signaled by hyperlocalism and the end of endorsements of candidates, she did not respond. Neither did Lacey. But he has often said that he wants his seventeen papers to stop running what he regards as politically correct stories about society's victims, to stop what he sees as boring Bush-bashing, and instead feature "hard-hitting investigative reports" that make waves locally.

The paper he bought had an immense amount of talent to do that. The greatness of the *LA Weekly* before the New Times takeover had been not only in Meyerson's columns blending history and political analysis, not only in Cooper's coverage of national and international politics and not only in John Powers's essays about "Bush World." It also had a great news department, where news editor Alan Mittelstaedt and editor

in chief Ochoa brought together some of LA's top investigative reporters. They included City Hall reporter Jeffrey Anderson, who wrote an award-winning exposé of incompetence and cronyism at the Department of Water and Power, and Zahniser, who did a strong cover story on gentrification. Mittelstaedt put together an award-winning special issue on smog. The newsroom buildup culminated with the summer 2006 hiring of the talented Daniel Hernandez away from the *LA Times* to cover Latino issues. The result was an alternative weekly with origins in the 1960s counterculture that had become a serious journalistic force in America's second-largest city by 2005.

But increasingly since the New Times takeover, the paper seems to be wasting that talent. "There was a time not all that long ago," said Rutten of the *LA Times*, "when we felt like we had to read the *Weekly* as soon as it came out, because they were competing with us. I don't think people at the *Times* feel that way any more. That's a loss to the city." The *Weekly*'s star writers are increasingly turning out New Times-style hit pieces. In February Zahniser blasted away at a school-board member whose offense consisted of remodeling his house without a building permit. That's the kind of "hard-hitting investigative reporting" that few people really care about. (As we go to press, LAObserved.com reports that Zahniser is leaving the *Weekly* for the *LA Times* because he "chafed at working with Jill Stewart.")

Mittelstaedt, the news editor fired in November to make room for Stewart, was back a few weeks later with an article about a UCLA cop who repeatedly Tasered a handcuffed Iranian-American student in the library. Video posted on the web showed the kid screaming in pain while dozens of horrified students watched. The video caused a national scandal, especially after the *LA Times* reported that the cop had also shot a homeless man on campus three years earlier and had been recommended for dismissal after an alleged assault on fraternity row. The old *Weekly* would have investigated the cop, but Mittelstaedt's piece was headlined TASER 'EM ALL. It declared that "the Iranian-American punk who provoked—yes, provoked—the Taser attack at UCLA should be expelled for momentarily distracting the entire world from more meaningful thoughts." That's not exactly investigative reporting or a critique of the powerful. But it represents the kind of contrarian, screw-you mentality that fits the New Times worldview now evident at the *LA Weekly*.

The changes New Times brought to the *LA Weekly* are even more stark at its sister publication, the *OC Weekly*. That paper seemed to embody everything Mike Lacey said he wanted in his papers: It was extremely lean, relying on a handful of brilliant reporters who bashed right and left with equal enthusiasm and style. It ran its own award-winning columns: the wonderful "Commie Girl," by Rebecca Schoenkopf, and the widely syndicated and hilarious "¡Ask a Mexican!" by Gustavo Arellano (typical question: "Why is it in their nature for Mexicans to steal?"). And the *OC Weekly* made a lot of money for the parent company—record profits the past two years, according to Will Swaim, who created and edited the paper for eleven years. It was one of the smallest alt weeklies in the country, famous for its Spartan ingenuity. And yet the *OC Weekly* won big awards: national awards for feature writing, political reporting, columns, art direction and graphic design.

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But to the amazement of all, Lacey drove Swaim to resign in January—and he was soon joined by Commie Girl and half a dozen other top staffers.

Swaim describes the paper he edited as “clearly left liberal—ask any Republican, and they’ll tell you we’re communists.” But, he said, Lacey & Co. “had no political issues with me. Because we went after people on the left, like [Representative] Loretta Sanchez, they were satisfied with us. I told them that going after somebody on the left does not prove you are not a lefty. In fact we do it because we *are* on the left. They just laughed, and drank more cocktails.”

What, then, drove Swaim to quit? “Two problems,” he said. “First, they gravely underestimate the value of writers. They have a kind of faux populism—they say they are against articles that say, ‘Look how smart I am.’ They have an insecurity about good writing, a combination of arrogance and ineptitude. Everything smart is ridiculed as pointy-headed.” The New Times business model, he said, was the second problem. The company has imposed a “fat layer of middle management,” to which editors are required to report. “Our covers have to be approved by a guy in Oakland. The film reviews are assigned by somebody in Denver. Five people oversee the marketing manager. They say it’s a sophisticated business system. My sense is that it’s lard. People who’ve never edited a newspaper tell editors how to edit.” Another *LA Weekly* employee familiar with New Times’s corporate strategy said the chain runs “the most Stalinist operation imaginable,” with “commissars in Phoenix” overseeing every phase of the seventeen newspapers, “from graphics to the web.”

Like many mediocre newspaper chains, New Times has imposed productivity standards for writers: “Basically, they count words,” Swaim said. “But you can’t measure quality by the number of words you write. That would make the phone book the greatest publication of all time. For them, a 2,500-word investigative piece is worth only twice as much as a 1,200-word food review. It’s grotesque. It really is bean counting.” So Swaim quit. Now he’s started a new alt weekly in Long Beach that competes directly with his old paper—and he took half a dozen of his top

staff from the *OC Weekly* with him to the new paper, called the *District*. It began publishing in April and distributes 30,000 copies weekly at 1,100 locations.

Lots of people have quit at other New Times papers: the editor of the *City Pages* in Minneapolis, Steve Perry; the editor of the *Seattle Weekly*, Skip Berger; and several editors at the *Village Voice*. Legendary *Voice* writers have been fired, including Robert Christgau, the dean of rock critics, and Washington correspondent James Ridgeway.

Mike Lacey started out on a different note in 1970, running an alternative antiwar weekly on the Arizona State campus. By the 1980s he had won respect among journalists for “kicking the shins of the *Arizona Republic*,” as longtime Phoenix journalist Dave Wagner told me. “New Times earned its bones by doing authentic, hard-hitting local investigative journalism that the local papers wouldn’t.” Today Lacey claims that’s the mission of all his papers. But in Southern California, at least, he’s gotten rid of editors who had made that their mission, especially Will Swaim and Alan Mittelstaedt.

Finally there are the cutbacks and speedups, what Steven Mikulan, who’s been a staff writer at the *LA Weekly* for twenty years and is currently the union president, calls the “Dickensian miserliness” of the whole operation. The *Weekly* has fired more than a dozen people since the takeover, including the entire fact-checking department. Wagner put it in the starkest terms: The New Times papers, he says, “are edited as though their accountants had already set the date of the final edition, perhaps a decade from now. They are wringing the last dollars out of what they regard as a dying medium, even as they slowly murder it.”

Is the goal of Lacey & Co. the same as what the Tribune Company seems to have in mind for the *LA Times*—to cut and cut some more, to publish a paper with a smaller and smaller staff of writers? Maybe the alternative press can survive on film reviews and calendar listings and the occasional hit piece on the mayor. Does the *LA Weekly* really need editorial content? “Maybe not,” one *Weekly* staffer told me. “Maybe Mike Lacey is a genius. We’re about to find out.” ■

LETTERS

C O N T I N U E D

(Continued From Page 2)

of human economic activity on our planet’s physical and natural resources. One of the basic conclusions of ecological economics is that in a finite world, such as the one in which we live, gross economic growth must someday end. It also pegs economic growth as the major reason for the continuing consumption of the natural world. Check out the International Society for Ecological Economics at www.ecoeco.org.

ROBERT FIREOVID

Kittery, Maine

■ It would do all those economists at the conference a world of good to change places with the custodians who cleaned up after them. Have them live on the minimum wage of the working poor and find out that the GDP is a myth that only measures productivity, not progress. Even

global corporations are realizing that a prosperous middle class is essential as a workforce and as consumers.

WILBUR N. RHODES

FLAW IN THE OINTMENT

Delmar, N.Y.

■ Thomas Palley, in “The Flaws in Rubinomics” [May 21] trenchantly outlines the flaws, but he misses an opportunity to put forward a compelling alternative narrative about fiscal policy. The Reagan-Bush-Bush policy of running up public debt has exacerbated the polarization in wealth over the past three decades by letting the rich lend to the government rather than pay their taxes. The progressive solution is to return the tax structure at least to the *status quo ante*, as Clinton more or less did with his OBRA93 tax increase. While the

budget surpluses of the 1990s were probably more a consequence of the boom than a cause, as Palley notes, they did demonstrate that surpluses need not inhibit high employment, provided the Fed keeps its foot on the monetary accelerator.

A fiscal program that reaps budget surpluses from progressive taxation, then uses them to pay down debt and invest in the Social Security and Medicare trust funds would permanently redistribute wealth to the working families who rely on these programs. Palley is right to worry that the rhetoric of Rubinomics risks backfiring on Democrats. We need an alternative rhetoric that emphasizes the potential distributional benefits of public wealth formation.

THOMAS MICHL
Professor of Economics
Colgate University

BOOKS & THE ARTS

The Iranian Impasse

JANET AFARY AND KEVIN B. ANDERSON

During a visit to Tehran in the spring of 2005, we were impressed by the degree of intellectual freedom Iranians had carved out within the Islamic Republic. The numerous bookstores on Enqelab Avenue across from Tehran University carried an array of newly translated books by Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault, among others. A lecture on “Foucault and Feminism” at Alzahra Women’s University elicited enthusiastic responses, including one from a high university official clad from head to toe in a black chador. A visit to the literary editors of the country’s most prestigious newspaper, *Shargh* (daily circulation 100,000), led to a conversation that ranged easily from religion and politics to Continental philosophers like Foucault, Theodor Adorno and Giorgio Agamben.

Of course, this was not the whole picture. Books on contemporary politics continued to be heavily censored. On the streets, the morality police harassed women who violated the regime’s stringent dress codes, and Tehran University still maintained sex-segregated cafeterias. Those who fought for social and political freedoms lived under constant threat. A feminist activist told us in a matter-of-fact tone that she feared a return visit to “Hotel Evin”—the notorious Evin Prison, where she had been tortured.

We were in Iran during the last days of the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, who had been elected by a landslide in 1997 after promising to carry out democratic reforms and open Iran to the outside. Some of those promises were kept, but many were not, and the real power remained in the hands of more conservative clerics like Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Even in the spring of 2005, we felt a hint of a chill as we left the country. At the airport, one of us had to go through a security check, a requirement for any Iranian pass-

port holder trying to leave the country. It was during precisely such a procedure that, a year later, reformist philosopher Ramin Jahanbegloo—who had brought Jürgen Habermas, Antonio Negri and the late Richard Rorty to speak in Tehran—was arrested and forced to make a public “confession.” By then, conservative populist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had been elected to the presidency. Ever since, Iran and the Western powers have clashed over Tehran’s nuclear program, leading to threats of military action from the United States and Israel and arrests of Iranian diplomats in Iraq.

At home, the Islamic Republic has cracked down hard on reformists, shutting down *Shargh* for six months and drastically tightening the enforcement of dress-code violations. Ahmadinejad’s initial Holocaust denials—which *Shargh* indirectly but courageously rebutted by running stories about the Nuremberg trials in late 2005—tarnished Iran’s reputation in the West. Khatami’s era of a “dialogue of civilizations” was over, at least as far as the state was concerned. As if to dispel any doubts about this, the regime arrested several Iranian-American intellectuals who had committed the “crime” of promoting cultural and scholarly dialogue between Iran and the West, among them Haleh Esfandiari, a 67-year-old scholar at

L’IRAN: Naissance d’une République Islamique.

By Yann Richard.
Martinière. 382 pp. Paper
23.50 euros.

IRAN: A People Interrupted.

By Hamid Dabashi.
New Press. 324 pp. \$26.95.

BRITAIN AND THE IRANIAN CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION OF 1906–11: Foreign Policy, Imperialism, and Dissent.

By Mansour Bonakdarian.
Syracuse. 577 pp. \$75.

CONVERSATIONS IN TEHRAN.

By Jean-Daniel Lafond
and Fred A. Reed.
Talonbooks. 224 pp. Paper \$19.95.

READING ‘LEGITIMATION CRISIS’ IN TEHRAN: Iran and the Future of Liberalism.

By Danny Postel.
Prickly Paradigm. 124 pp.
Paper \$10.

Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson teach at Purdue University. They are the authors of Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism.

the Woodrow Wilson Center and the wife of Shaul Bakhash, a distinguished historian of Iran. (Esfandiari was in Iran visiting her mother when she was detained.) While the situation is not entirely bleak—Tehran's bookstores continue to display their new titles, and *Shargh* has won the right to reopen—the cause of human rights and intellectual freedom has suffered a significant setback since 2005.

What went wrong? When reform-minded Iranians discuss this question, the conversation often turns to the 1906-11 Constitutional Revolution, widely seen as a missed opportunity for democratic modernization.

This has been especially true in the past couple of years, as its centenary is celebrated by Iranians at home and abroad.

The Constitutional Revolution was the first democratic revolution to take place in the Middle East, and perhaps the most important. The revolution established a freely elected Parliament and a Constitution with civil liberties, severely limited the powers of the shah and promoted the establishment of women's schools and councils. It also set up a state-based judiciary that challenged the traditional authority of the Shiite clerics. As Yann Richard, France's leading Iran specialist, observes in his latest book *L'Iran: Naissance d'une république islamique* (Birth of an Islamic Republic), from the late eighteenth century through the mid-nineteenth century the Shiite clergy had provided a counterweight to the monarchy. But with the emergence of two heterodox offshoots of Shiism in the mid-nineteenth century, Babism and Bahaism—both of which challenged social hierarchies, including gender inequality—the clerical establishment drew closer to the state in order to combat these dissident religious movements. When the Constitutional Revolution broke out, some influential clerics sided with the state; one of them, Sheikh Fazlullah Nuri, was executed by the revolutionaries. Yet the leading clerics were by no means united in opposition to the revolution: Quite a few embraced the changes, with some going so far as to endorse Nuri's execution.

As Hamid Dabashi recounts in *Iran: A People Interrupted*, this "revolution in the very moral fabric of a nation" was, like most later progressive movements in Iran, marked by the participation of its ethnic and religious minorities—Azeris, Armenians, Bahais and Jews. The revolution also saw an unprecedented flowering of Iranian literature. Hoping to build what Dabashi calls

"an anti-colonial modernity," the great writer Ali Akbar Dehkhoda launched a campaign in the press against oppressive social customs (especially regarding gender). Socialist ideas from the 1905 Russian Revolution entered the country through Baku and Tbilisi.

The revolution faced two formidable external adversaries, however, in the British Empire and Czarist Russia. The 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention, which divided

The collapse of the reform movement and the rise of President Ahmadinejad have dealt a significant blow to human rights in Iran.

Iran into a northern Russian and a southern British sphere of influence, showed that the great powers were bent on pursuing a more aggressive imperialism in the region. In 1911 Russian troops, with British approval, moved to just outside Tehran and threatened to take over the capital unless the Parliament was disbanded. An internal coup ended the standoff and brought the revolution to an end. Although the 1906 Constitution was retained until 1979, it was reduced to a formality.

Marking the birth of democratic politics in Iran, the Constitutional Revolution remains a source of inspiration for Iranian progressives. And because the revolution drew upon the support of Western progressives, it has also led some Iranians to reassess their relationship with their Western peers. Not the least of the virtues of Mansour Bonakdarian's erudite and original study *Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11* is that it challenges some of the fashionable post-colonial assumptions about Iranian history, particularly the notion that the British of a century ago were uniformly Orientalists bent on establishing imperial hegemony over Iran. Without in any way minimizing the brutality and destructiveness of imperialism, Bonakdarian argues that Iran's democratic experiment was fostered—and not merely undermined—by engagement with the West. His Occident is populated not only by British diplomat Lord George Curzon, who orchestrated the 1907 convention, but also by W.E.B. Du Bois and other participants in the 1900 Pan-African Conference in London, as well as Irish MPs who identified with Iran's struggle for self-determination and freedom. The Constitutional Revolution had many British supporters, at the head of whom stood the remarkable Cambridge Orientalist Edward G. Browne. Iran's supporters in Britain in-

cluded radical MPs in the Liberal Party, Labour MPs, Irish Nationalist MPs and socialist members of the Persia Committee, which worked closely with Iranian democrats. The socialist and liberal press, including the *Manchester Guardian*, also sided with the Iranian revolutionaries. These groups maintained that Iran and other nations of the East had the right to determine their own destiny. For a time, their pressure stayed the hands of Britain and Russia.

After the Constitutional Revolution, Iran's modernization continued but under starkly different conditions. (The best overview of this process in English remains Nikki Keddie's *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, published in 1981 and updated in 2006.) Brought to power with British support in the early 1920s, Reza Shah Pahlavi imposed a new form of authoritarian nationalism, in contrast with the Constitutional Revolution's democratic nationalism. Even as he crushed the left and muzzled political life, he also secularized the legal and educational systems, integrated women and minorities into civil society, and decreased the powers of the clerical establishment. After the Allies replaced him with his young son Muhammad Reza Shah in 1941, the struggle for democracy resumed, with the formation of new political parties like the pro-Soviet Communist Party (Tudeh) and Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh's National Front. The immensely popular Mossadegh, who had earlier taken part in the Constitutional Revolution, became prime minister in 1951.

As prime minister, Mossadegh achieved two cherished goals of Iranian democrats: wresting control over Iran's oil from foreign interests and limiting the authority of the shah. Studies like *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*, edited by Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, and Stephen Kinzer's *All the Shah's Men* have chronicled how the United States and Britain calumniated Mossadegh as a Communist sympathizer, using their intelligence services to orchestrate his overthrow and restore the shah to absolute power. Democratic political parties and trade unions were then crushed by the SAVAK, a brutal secret police force trained by the CIA and Israel's Mossad. Over time, the religious opposition filled the political vacuum.

Muhammad Reza Shah enacted land reform and women's suffrage through the top-down White Revolution of 1963. It unleashed fierce clerical hostility against the shah, with nationalists and leftists divided in their response. Soon to be desig-

nated an ayatollah, Ruhollah Khomeini led antigovernment protests against the White Revolution that combined opposition to women's suffrage and land reform with anti-imperialist and antimonarchist rhetoric. In the 1970s, younger intellectuals like the lay theologian Ali Shariati, author of *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, wove Shiism and anti-imperialism into a political theology that won over many leftists and nationalists. For his part, Khomeini resurrected an obscure religious principle known as *velayat-e faqih* (rule of the jurist or cleric) and began to advocate the replacement of the monarchy by an Islamist state, to be led by a supreme religious leader.

As Richard and Dabashi remind us, the revolutionary left played a role in the opposition to the shah. Although the Tudeh had been eviscerated by the SAVAK, a new generation of socialists influenced by Maoism engaged in small-scale guerrilla warfare. In admiring language perfumed with nostalgia, Dabashi celebrates the mid-1970s, with its secular revolutionary intelligentsia, as a period of "cosmopolitan worldliness." That it was, indeed; but for all their sophistication and creativity, the Iranian leftist intellectuals of the 1970s failed to grasp the dangers of Islamism, ignoring or overlooking its racist, sexist and theocratic aspects in the name of the struggle against the shah and Western imperialism. During the 1978–79 revolution, Khomeini promised a break with Western imperialism—both cultural and political—and a new type of politics that would be superior to both liberal democracy and statist socialism. Instead, as Said Amir Arjomand has shown in *The Turban for the Crown*, Khomeini established a theocracy that had some parallels to fascism and immediately targeted leftists, feminists, gay men and Kurds. Bahaism was proscribed, and other religious minorities were reduced to second-class status.

Although some Iranian leftists briefly defended women's rights during the March 1979 demonstrations against the new regime's policy of compulsory veiling, their myopia on gender, human rights and democracy left them ideologically defenseless against Iran's Islamist rulers once the latter adopted a strongly anti-imperialist program. In books like Haideh Moghissi's *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, feminists who participated in the revolution have grappled with the left's failure to confront Islamism's repressive features. The new generation of Iranian intellectuals, for whom Islamism's authoritarian face is only too familiar, has been equally critical.

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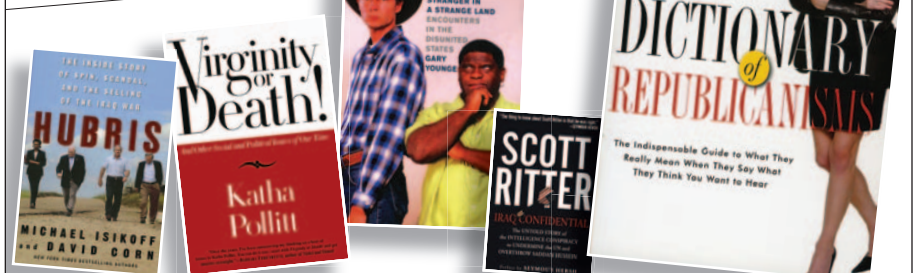
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GREAT GIFTS

As Richard shows, the Western left responded to the 1978–79 revolution in sharply divergent ways. Some preferred to look past the Iranian Revolution's religious dimension, viewing the events as an essentially nationalist insurgency. Michel Foucault stood out for recognizing the novelty of the revolution, particularly the significance of religion, but, Richard writes, he was "fooled by the romanticism" of a revolution that sought to undermine Western modernity through a "political spirituality." The most sober appraisal on the left came from Richard's mentor, the late Maxime Rodinson, a renowned French Marxist scholar of Islam and author of the definitive biography of the Prophet Muhammad. Rodinson warned that Khomeini's anti-imperialism concealed an authoritarian "moral" agenda that would curtail individual freedom and women's rights. This assessment has held up far better than Foucault's, but the Islamic Republic also proved to be more resilient and adaptable than its critics predicted.

During the first months after the revolution, Khomeini's grip on power was tenuous, but the vastly popular seizure of American hostages in November 1979 strengthened his position. Saddam Hussein's 1980 invasion of Iran, undertaken with Western encouragement and underwritten by the Arab Gulf states, galvanized patriotic sentiment to the benefit of the new regime. During this long war, which lasted until 1988, Khomeini accused his critics of treason and increased the pace of repression. A variety of new paramilitary groups aided the regime in carrying out a "cultural revolution" to "cleanse" the universities of secular and leftist students and faculty members. This harsh early period is the subject of Azar Nafisi's poignant memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran*.

The Islamic Revolution broke with the national, political, legal and social ethos of the Constitutional Revolution, though not entirely with its modern institutional apparatus, such as the Parliament, the media and the military, which it harnessed to its agenda. Islamist women attained leadership posts in the state, were recruited for the war effort and joined women's paramilitary organizations that enforced the state's rules of morality on other, more secular women.

After Khomeini's death in 1989, Ali Khamenei emerged as the new Supreme Leader, with Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as the new president. At this juncture, some disillusioned founders of the Islamic

Republic slowly began to question the system, occasionally making common cause with more secular dissidents. The so-called New Religious Thinkers (*now andishan-e dini*) focused on the project of democratizing Shiite Islam, and their ideas gradually gave rise to a new civil society movement (*nehzat-e jame'eh-ye madani*), which helped elect President Khatami in 1997 and has continued to conduct a highly sophisticated debate about Islam, modernity and democracy. Some of the New

Iran's revolution captivated some Western radicals, most notably Foucault, who believed it heralded a new 'political spirituality.'

Religious Thinkers, such as theologian Abdolkarim Soroush, have called for a re-examination of the tenets of Islam where they clash with religious tolerance. Others, such as cleric Mohammad Mojtabeh Shabestari, have joined more secular human rights activists like Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi and journalist Akbar Ganji in calling on the government to ratify the United Nations Convention on Human Rights. But the Khatami administration was cautious and sought only to moderate the Islamist regime. In the summer of 1999, large-scale student demonstrations were crushed by hard-liners after Khatami refused to support them.

Jean-Daniel Lafond and Fred Reed's *Conversations in Tehran* offers a wealth of interesting interviews with members of the reform movement. Cleric Mohsen Kadivar believes that he and other reformists broke new ground in their criticisms of Khomeini's concept of clerical rule, showing that it had no basis in the Koran or the traditions of the Prophet. Reformists also called for religious reform along modern lines. Ali Paya, a reformist philosopher, thinks that the reformists succeeded in changing the public conversation and even "transformed the mindset of an entire generation" by popularizing phrases like "public sphere," "human rights," "rule of law" and "democracy." Others are less sanguine about the future. Javad Tabatabai, a former professor of philosophy, thinks that Iranian intellectuals have always tried to create an untenable amalgam between Islam and Western thought. And an economics professor notes that the economy was "Khatami's Achilles' heel"—Khatami and his reformist allies lost, in his view, because they failed to address the public's basic needs.

In his new book, Dabashi echoes some

of these criticisms of the reform movement. He also reminds readers that many reformists played a role in the intellectual repression of the 1980s, especially at Tehran University. Yet Dabashi refuses to recognize the contribution that reformist theologians like Soroush, Kadivar and Shabestari have made to a more tolerant and democratic Iranian society. Dabashi also casts aspersions on Ganji's hunger strike outside the UN in 2006 in protest of repression inside Iran, arguing that "people like Ganji" are becoming "very natural bedfellows of the U.S. neocons."

In Dabashi's view, Ganji and other dissidents should have been "placing the Iranian situation within the larger geopolitics of the region," at a time when Israel had attacked Lebanon and the United States was threatening Iran. Never mind that Ganji denounced the invasion of Lebanon, or that he opposes strongly not only US military action against Iran but also its so-called democracy funding, or that Ganji enjoys considerable prestige among students and dissidents inside Iran because of his defiant behavior in the regime's courts and his hunger strikes at Evin Prison. Apparently, the timing of his protest was just wrong. That, unfortunately, has too often been the attitude of progressives toward Iranian oppositionists from the onset of the revolution, when the feminists were the first to come onto the streets against the new theocracy, in their demonstration of March 8, 1979.

Dabashi is staunchly critical of the Iranian state's racism, narrow nationalism and anti-Semitism. But while he styles himself as a feminist, he is surprisingly dismissive of contemporary Iranian feminists, who are often treated in his book as misguided at best and, at worst, fellow travelers of the Bush Administration. "Services" rendered to "the US imperial design" are attributed to Azar Nafisi, while the young Iranian-American feminist writer Roya Hakakian also comes under attack. Shirin Ebadi is accused of getting dangerously close to the neocons because she made the "unfortunate choice" of working with another liberal feminist, Azadeh Moaveni, the translator and co-author of the Nobel laureate's 2006 memoir, *Iran Awakening*. These are risible charges, since all of these feminists have opposed US intervention in Iran and have denounced US policies in the region. (For a feminist response to Dabashi, see Firoozeh Papan-Matin's forthcoming article in *The Common Review*, "Reading (and Misreading) Lolita in Teh-

ran.”) The main sin of the Iranian dissidents and feminists Dabashi assails seems to be their decision to devote more attention to human rights in Iran than to the critique of American imperialism.

Dabashi's discussion of Iranian studies is equally coarse. Take, for instance, his intemperate denunciations of the Columbia University-based *Encyclopedia Iranica*—an exemplary work of documentation that has paid special attention to Iran's religious and ethnic minorities and has substantial entries on feminists, homosexuality, slavery and numerous other subjects that cannot be discussed as openly inside Iran today—and of the flagship journal of the field, *Iranian Studies*—currently edited by Homa Katouzian, a leading historian of the Mossadegh era. The scholarship of the *Encyclopedia Iranica* and *Iranian Studies*, indeed of the entire field of Iranian studies, he opines, is “a direct descendent of old-fashioned Orientalism...now mostly inhabited by native scholars, a nativist disposition, and cast in entirely domesticated and (ultra) nationalistic terms.” This kind of rhetorical overkill permeates Dabashi's book and is especially regrettable coming from the author of such nuanced studies as *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*.

For the hard-liners who sought to rein in the reformers during the Khatami era, the election of George W. Bush provided an unexpected opportunity. When Bush called Iran part of an “axis of evil” in 2002, despite its behind-the-scenes assistance in toppling the Taliban, and warned of possible military action against Iran, the reformers, many of whom had campaigned for diplomatic relations with the United States, became easy prey. Hard-liners clamped down on the press, arrested ministers and parliamentary deputies, and escalated the kidnapping and murder of reform activists and even some members of Parliament.

The election of Ahmadinejad to the presidency in June 2005 marked the end of the reform era. While religious and secular oppositionists continued to call for greater civil liberties, they and much of the youth had become disillusioned with Khatami and his reformist colleagues. More than 20 million voters boycotted the elections, from which many prominent reformists had been excluded through a vetting process. Boycotters were heeding calls from democratic dissidents like Ganji and Ebadi. A former mayor of Tehran backed by the Supreme Leader and the Revolutionary Guards, Ahmadinejad was able to defeat

the corrupt Rafsanjani. Ahmadinejad's election marked the ascendancy of militant veterans of the Iran-Iraq War. Shrewdly exploiting the reformists' failure to address issues of poverty and class, Ahmadinejad promised to reduce unemployment and to provide greater subsidies, especially low-interest loans. Since his election, conservatives have gained a firmer grip on power and cracked down on labor, women and gays.

Thanks to US interventions in neighboring Afghanistan and Iraq, the Islamic Republic's two most formidable enemies in the region, the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, have been vanquished, while the Shiite-dominated state emerging under the American occupation in Iraq is poised to become a key ally of Tehran. Khamenei and Ahmadinejad have also turned the nuclear issue into a matter of national pride, comparing it to Mossadegh's fight for the nationalization of Iran's oil. The Islamic Republic's support for Hezbollah during the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon has gained it many admirers internationally, while Ahmadinejad has forged alliances with Latin American leftists like Hugo Chávez and Daniel Ortega.

Nonetheless, opposition inside Iran has continued, whether in the form of the

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One Million Signatures Campaign for women's rights, or the Tehran bus drivers' strike, or the 2006 local elections, where candidates backed by Ahmadinejad were soundly defeated in Tehran and many other places.

For many people on the left outside Iran, the era of Ahmadinejad has presented a quandary, forcing them to choose between anti-imperialism (at the risk of defending an Islamist theocracy) and solidarity with the opponents of a repressive theocracy (at the risk of appearing to do the bidding of the Bush Administration). Danny Postel, an editor at the online journal *openDemocracy*, believes that much of the left has made the wrong choice, ignoring the great promise of Iran's dissident movement. In *Reading "Legitimation Crisis" in Tehran*, Postel takes the US left to task for neglecting this important social movement and suggests that the new Iranian democratic discourse is an original form of "liberal Third Worldism" that is distinct from neoliberalism and deserving of our support. (One chapter is pointedly titled "We Know What We're Against, But What Are We For?") The US left, he believes, has made the error of viewing Iran through a narrow "American prism," rightly opposing US military threats against the Islamic Republic but failing to raise its voice in support of Iranian progressives battling theocratic repression—i.e., failing to demonstrate solidarity with our true allies in Iran. But anti-imperialism need not come at the expense of solidarity. (A similar error, notes Postel, was made during the Bosnian war, when "anti-imperialism" led some on the left to side with Milosevic's Serbia.)

The heart of Postel's book is a long interview with French-educated philosopher Ramin Jahanbegloo, who discusses the ongoing interplay between Iranian and Western intellectual traditions and social thought. Unfortunately, by the time Postel's book was published, Jahanbegloo had been imprisoned in Evin and pressured into silence. (Dabashi, while praising Jahanbegloo as a "sincere social activist," writes that he possesses a "colonized mind" because of his belief in "modernity" and his supposed failure to endorse the critiques of modernity by Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida.)

Jahanbegloo's fate echoes that of other Iranian progressives over the past century who have so often been driven into exile, imprisoned or killed. The secularizing, progressive revolution that began in 1906 and continued with Mossadegh remains unfinished, the pace of reform slowed by the

weight of clerical rule. While the Islamic Republic has been forced to open up somewhat since Khomeini's death in 1989, it has also shown itself to be far more resilient than its critics understood. This is partly because, by many sociological measures, Iran has come a long way since 1979. Life expectancy has increased to more than seventy years, infant mortality by age 5 has dropped to thirty-six per 1,000 live births, fertility rates have decreased to 1.7 births per woman and women make up more than 60 percent of the students enrolled in colleges and universities. But the chief card the regime has played is national unity in the

face of external threats—a gift that keeps giving, courtesy most recently of the Bush Administration. These threats (particularly talk in Washington of "regime change") have emboldened Iran's hard-liners and driven its vibrant democratic movement into a strategic impasse. The challenge facing progressives in North America is to find a way to give more support to Iranian democrats and feminists even as we oppose the US imperial agenda. The international solidarity displayed by progressive members of the British public during the era of Iran's Constitutional Revolution just might provide us with a model. ■

Vertical Disintegration

JAMES RON

HOLLOW LAND: Israel's Architecture of Occupation. By Eyal Weizman. Verso. 318 pp. \$34.95.

In 2002 Israel began building a fence, ditch and wall combo between its internationally recognized territory and the Palestinian West Bank, arguing this was the best way to protect Israel's heartland from Palestinian suicide bombers. In fact, the barrier was a desperate last-minute attempt to resolve

a thorny security problem of Israel's own making. Ever since the late 1970s, Israel's aggressive colonization project had exponentially increased traffic flows across the Green Line, making it all but impossible to separate legitimate from clandestine travelers. Many of the 400,000 Jewish settlers travel across the Green Line daily, as do thousands of occupation soldiers. Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem has given tens of thousands of Palestinians Israeli identity cards, allowing them to cross the line at will. Until recently, there were dozens of potential crossing points, as well as long stretches of ungarded frontier. As a result of these and other Israeli policies, the boundary between "Israel" and "Palestine" had almost disappeared, enormously complicating efforts to filter out suicide bombers. The barrier was thus built to stanch a self-inflicted wound, creating an impenetrable obstacle to channel all travel between Israel and the West Bank through a few heavily policed gates.

Many liberals oppose the effort, arguing that since it does not faithfully follow the Green Line, it is a de facto land grab in advance of an Arab-Israeli accord. The wall

divides many Palestinian communities in two, cutting Arab East Jerusalem from the West Bank, and will eventually leave 250,000 Palestinians stranded on the wrong side. Yet many occupation opponents view the project more positively, arguing that it is tangible proof of Greater Israel's demise.

The optimists' logic is simple. For years, Israel banned any sign of separation from Palestine, erasing the Green Line from official maps and instructing young Israelis that the Land of Israel stretched to the river Jordan. In 2002, for the first time, an Israeli government led by redoubtable hawk Ariel Sharon reversed course, building a borderlike structure that signals, perhaps, the end of the settlement era. Palestinian suicide bombers appeared to have accomplished in just two years what decades of political protest and diplomacy failed to do.

Eyal Weizman, the author of *Hollow Land*, believes the optimists are wrong. He says Ariel Sharon never conceived of the wall as a dividing line between Palestine and Israel but rather as the last line of defense in a permanent Jewish control matrix stretching across the West Bank. Weizman is a young Israeli architect whose studies of the "architecture of occupation" have won him renown in some quarters and notoriety in others. He has a keen eye for design, space and structure, bringing a refreshingly

James Ron, associate professor at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs in Ottawa, is the author of Frontiers and Ghettos: State Violence in Serbia and Israel.

new perspective to a topic hitherto ruled by journalists, historians and social scientists. The result is one of the most original books on Israel to appear in years.

To reach his pessimistic conclusions, Weizman returns to a bitter debate between Israeli generals after the 1967 war, when IDF troops squared off against Egyptian forces along the Suez Canal. The dominant school of thought, led by then-Chief of Staff Haim Bar Lev, wanted a massive, linear, trench-and-wall barrier along the Israeli side of the canal. The plan was to build with sand, hoping that when Egyptian artillery rounds landed, the barrier would be further compacted. This scheme was opposed by Sharon, then a popular young general, who argued that linear fortifications were passé; a single breach of the line, Sharon warned, would trigger the entire front's collapse. Instead, he advocated a matrix-like system of "defense in depth" composed of multiple hilltop fortifications stretching back for miles. Engineers would build roads linking smaller front-line forts to larger rear bases, creating a dense thicket of defensive hubs rather than a single brittle line. (The Gaza Strip, which has descended into internal war, was never integral to Israel's long-term planning. Home to hundreds of thousands of refugees and their descendants, the Strip is essentially a fenced-in prison where rival gangs battle for control. The "disengagement" has made it easier for the Israeli government to transform it into a military frontier like Lebanon.)

Bar Lev won the debate but his linear fortification almost lost the war. In October 1973, Egyptian engineers melted his barrier with powerful jets of water, sending columns of tanks crashing through the breached line. As Sharon predicted, the Israeli front collapsed, but at the last moment Sharon and others reversed the tide, leading an armored charge across the canal that cut Egyptian armies off in the rear. In large part because of this humiliation, Bar Lev's Labor Party fled government in disgrace four years later, ceding power for the first time to an insurgent right-wing bloc led by Menachem Begin and his religious allies.

Backed by a growing and increasingly messianic settler movement, Begin, always a champion of the Greater Israel idea, assumed power with a burning desire to colonize the West Bank. As minister in charge of the effort, Sharon was given enormous leeway and vast funds. Previous governments had constructed a thin thread of Jewish settlements along Israel's Jordan border, but Sharon treated this effort with the same disdain he had expressed for Bar

Lev's Suez line. Instead, Sharon imagined a civilian version of his "defense in depth" plan for the West Bank, including a dense matrix of civilian and military posts scattered across Palestine's heartland. His dream became reality in the 1980s and early '90s, when the West Bank buzzed with the sound of Israeli bulldozers. Urban planners worked hand in glove with settlers and soldiers, flooding Palestine with dozens of attractively priced all-Jewish neighborhoods. And while builders placed civilian homes rather than tanks on Palestine's hilltops, their design, as noted by Weizman's architect's eye, followed a military logic, with concentric circles, fences, searchlights and patrol roads. "The outward-facing arrangement of [hilltop] homes," he writes, allow settlers to look down on Palestinian villages and towns, transforming the West Bank into "an optical matrix radiating out from a proliferation of lookout points/settlements scattered across the landscape." He quotes *Ha'aretz's* Gideon Levy, who claims most Palestinian homes "can spot the settlement on the hilltop from their windows." Although the settlements are inhabited by Jewish civilians, they have been integrated into the military's ongoing efforts to pacify Palestinians. No wonder, then, that they so often serve as targets for attacks by Palestinian militants.

In 2002 Sharon appeared to have suddenly slammed on the brakes, building a linear wall close to the Israeli border in an operation that would have made Bar Lev proud. What happened? Did the leopard really change his spots?

No, *Hollow Land* claims, suggesting that the wall's appearance and surrounding media hullabaloo have been misleading. The barrier has in fact "ceased being a singular, contiguous object," Weizman writes. Instead, it has become a series of "separate shards, fragments and discontinuous vectors. Like a worm sliced into segments each assuming a renewed life, the fragments of the Wall[now]...curl around isolated settlement blocs and along the roads connecting them." Each of these "depth barriers," as Israeli officials term them, have their own sensors and fortifications; they are mini-Walls of their own.

Thus, for example, 50,000 settlers living in four key West Bank settlements—Ariel, Emanuel, Qedumim and Karnei Shomron—now reside in walled, extraterritorial islands situated deep within Palestinian space. But since public debate has focused on the wall's visible, linear components, these and other depth barriers, Weizman says, remain "largely invisible to international criticism."



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The wall's main north-south component is slated to encompass fifty-five Jewish settlements on its Israeli side, leaving more than 100 on the Palestinian side. Some of these are being transformed into self-contained forts, but others are being connected to the main barrier with protected roads. Few will be willingly abandoned, serving instead as hardened strong-points within Sharon's original West Bank matrix. If this plan comes to fruition, the north-south barrier will become the last line of defense between Palestinians and Israel, rather than the first point of contact between Israel and a new Palestinian state.

Yet this plan seems to defy logic, since, as Weizman observes, Israel under Sharon and others has repeatedly promised the United States, the Europeans and its own citizens that it will permit the creation of a territorially contiguous Palestinian state. All that is required, Israel's leaders say, is for the Palestinians to set their own house in order. Still, the settlements slice the West Bank beyond recognition, and Israel gives no indication of dismantling them. How, then, can it promise to create a viable Palestinian state?

It is here that *Hollow Land* makes its most powerful contribution, offering a vision of the conflict that only an architect could have provided. Israeli planners, Weizman claims, no longer think of the West Bank in two-dimensional terms; instead, they have re-imagined the land as a multilayered system akin to an architect's project model. In this "hollow land," Weizman predicts, Israeli planners plan for Jews—and eventually Arabs—to go about their business in vertically separate worlds. Palestinian "contiguity," in this scenario, will be a three-dimensional affair based on flyovers, tunnels and bridges. "A new way of imagining space has emerged," Weizman explains. "After fragmenting the surface of the West Bank by walls and other barriers, Israeli planners started attempting to weave it together as two separate but overlapping national geographies—two territorial networks overlapping across the same area in three dimensions, without

having to cross or come together."

Consider Weizman's assertion that Israel has decoupled Palestine's land surface from the air and ground beneath. The Israeli government views aerial supremacy as crucial to its military edge and considers Palestinian aquifers vital for its standard of living. Thus Israel has limited Palestinian authority to the surface, trapping a thin Palestinian sliver between two thicker Israeli wedges. Yet since Israel will never withdraw entirely from the West Bank without first defeating its powerful settler

tinian surface as an international border.

In a particularly fascinating chapter, Weizman reports that this thinking helped shape US diplomatic efforts. In 2000 President Bill Clinton used verticality to try to broker an accord over Jerusalem's Old City, where Islamic holy sites, surrounded by their Jewish equivalents, present negotiators with overwhelming challenges. Using input from an Israeli architect, Clinton proposed Palestinian sovereignty over the surface of the Islamic Haram al-Sharif, coupled with Israeli sovereignty over the

ground beneath, including the Jewish Temple Mount, and the air above. The Palestinian land patch would be connected to adjacent Arab neighborhoods—which themselves are partially surrounded by Jewish homes—by a pedestrian bridge elevated on pillars sunk in Israeli territory. The Palestine-Israel border, in other words, would flip from horizontal to vertical and then back again.

Although this may have been a laudable attempt at conflict resolution, as Weizman makes clear, most Israeli efforts to reorganize Palestinian space are not so well-meaning. The settlement

effort, for example, has brutally transformed the West Bank's landscape, using violence, theft and displacement to get the job done. Israel's military is also deeply involved in spatial "re-imagining," often to devastating effect. In 2002, Weizman reports, Israel's campaign to reoccupy the West Bank's densely packed Palestinian refugee camps and neighborhoods foundered in mazes of narrow, winding and stoutly defended alleyways. In response, Israeli commanders creatively reconceptualized Palestinian urban space, "walking through walls" by blowing holes in the sides of Palestinian homes, inserting infantry teams into the openings and sending them burrowing further inward with sledgehammers and explosives. "This space that you look at," the commander of one such operation explained to Weizman in an interview, "is nothing but your interpretation." While Weizman does not say so explicitly, this statement illustrates much of *Hollow Land*'s overall thesis. Israel never accepts physical or geographic constraints as givens, using



Urban warfare training site Chicago (Tze'elim base) in the Negev Desert.

ADAM BROOMBERG AND OLIVER CHANARIN

lobby, even this wedge-like entity will not likely emerge any time soon. But even this vision is overly optimistic, Weizman says. For the real Israeli plan is to build two vertically segregated transportation networks that will shuttle Jews and Palestinians between their communities in splendid, ethnonational isolation.

To illustrate this point, Weizman describes the bridge-and-tunnel combination Israel built in 1996 to connect Jewish Jerusalem with its Hebron-area settlements. To maintain the artery's all-Jewish nature, Israeli engineers tunneled underneath the Arab town of Beit Jalla, the surface of which, according to the 1993 Oslo accord, is under exclusive Palestinian authority. Construction crews then elevated other sections of the road on tall pillars, sending Jewish vehicles soaring above Palestinian valleys. The bridges and tunnels themselves are under Israeli control, creating a layered stack of sovereignties. One day, lawyers may designate the point of contact between Jewish bridge and Pales-

force, creativity and financial resources to “build facts on the ground” and bend the environment to its will.

To be sure, some readers may view Weizman’s analysis as excessively bleak, arguing that a more benign application of Israeli spatial creativity could help end the current impasse. In their optimistic moments, Israeli planners envision Palestinians and Jews flowing smoothly through the same West Bank envelope, peacefully driving in separate but secure transportation networks. Neither community will suffer further displacement, and each will pursue its own interests in harmonious isolation. In this appealing scenario, Weizman notes, the West Bank has been reconstructed to resemble a modern airport, with separate inbound and outbound corridors securely shuttling different passenger categories from one place to another. This vision is enormously seductive, using verticality to resolve insoluble disputes. Yet Weizman remains skeptical, arguing that the entire concept is ultimately a futile scheme to “separate the inseparable.” No Israeli architectural design, no matter how creative, can ever untangle the Gordian population knot Israel has created through colonization.

Weizman does not systematically support his pessimism, but it takes little imagination to figure out why he might be so inclined. For starters, Palestinians remain deeply suspicious of Israeli intentions, fearing that anything short of full withdrawal will turn into a trick. Fears of bad Israeli faith are not idle ones. In the 1990s, after all, Israel used the Oslo interregnum to double its settler population, arguing it was “thickening” existing colonies rather than building new ones. To be sure, Palestinians did agree at Oslo to the creation of a tunnel/bridge structure between the West Bank and Gaza, but they would likely oppose expansion of this concept to their entire country. According to Weizman, for example, Clinton’s Jerusalem plan was rejected outright by Yasir Arafat and his aides, who viewed it as an unacceptable infringement of their rights. They feared, it seemed, that Israel and the United States were using verticality to play them for suckers. To a population long controlled by Israeli self-interest, three-dimensional plans must seem like deception rather than creative diplomacy.

More important, perhaps, Palestinians remain bitterly opposed to Jewish settlements, built as they are on strategic hilltops that dominate their surroundings, monopolize scarce resources and physically partition their land. Armed settlers have provoked much strife, and few Palestinians

would accept a plan that left these Jewish forts in their midst. Nothing in the history of Israeli occupation, moreover, suggests Israel would ever invest the necessary effort to build a proper Palestinian transportation system. “Separate but equal” rarely works, and the Jewish bridge-and-tunnel network is likely to remain far superior to its Palestinian equivalent. Two worlds have already emerged, Weizman writes, explaining that “one is an upper-land—the land of the settlements—a scattering of well-tended hilltop neighborhoods woven together by modern highways for the exclusive use of its inhabitants; the other, Palestine—crowded cities, towns, and villages that inhabit the valleys between and underneath the hills, maintaining fragile connections on improvised underpasses.” No matter what Israeli planners tell the public, this inequality is likely to persist for years to come.

Would all this hold true even if vertical reconstruction were underwritten by billions of international dollars and much diplomatic goodwill? Weizman does not say, but even this rosy scenario does not seem promising. Although some Palestinians might be comforted by international peacekeepers and World Bank investments, a layered stack of sovereignties would still be encumbered by endless potential flashpoints. Each flyover or bridge would become a target for militants, and each tunnel would become a potential deathtrap. The vertical system, Weizman argues, is a “bewildering and impossible Escher-like territorial arrangement,” a fragile fantasy that will not stand the test of time. It is architectural theater masquerading as political solution, not a real, workable compromise. The smoothly functioning airport is not likely to emerge; instead, a vertically reconstructed West Bank will probably become a *Mad Max* nightmare, with Palestinian and Israeli gunmen blasting each other’s vehicles from above and below. Horizontal partitions may be unimaginative and boring, but if there is no real will to live together, they can probably do a better job of separation. Yet since even a partial Israeli withdrawal is unlikely, the conflict will likely splutter and flare for years.

Like some Palestinians and Israelis, Weizman appears disenchanted with partition, sensing that a shared binational state may offer the best long-term solution. He does not explore this notion in much depth, however, and offers little evidence that it will become practical anytime soon.

The book’s prognosis is thus desperate and gloomy, but Weizman supports it with prodigious documentation, rare interviews and a remarkable eye for the politics of

design. His chapter on Jerusalem’s architectural bylaws, for example, is a masterpiece of political analysis, noting that after the 1967 occupation, Israeli planners sought to integrate Jewish settlements visually with the rest of the city by using traditional Palestinian materials and designs. The “Jerusalem stone” that builders are now legally bound to use comes in fact from Palestinian quarries. Its price, however, puts it far beyond the reach of ordinary Palestinians.

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Jewish construction thus uses Palestinian land, materials and designs to build homes destined for exclusive Jewish use, and the irony of all this is impressive.

Another arresting chapter focuses on the use of postmodern urban theories by cutting-edge Israeli security analysts. Military officers have been assigned hard-core theoretical texts to get a better handle on the chaotic structure of Palestinian militancy, spurring new military methods, including the "walking through walls" approach to urban warfare. Critical theory, Weizman warns, is easily "subsumed and made operative" by officials in power.

Weizman's architectural approach makes *Hollow Land* a tonic for even the most jaded observers of the Israel-Palestine tragedy, including those who fear nothing truly new can ever be written about the Middle Eastern conflict. The book's prognosis is not uplifting, but the quality of its analysis is truly exciting. ■

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PUZZLE NO. 3090

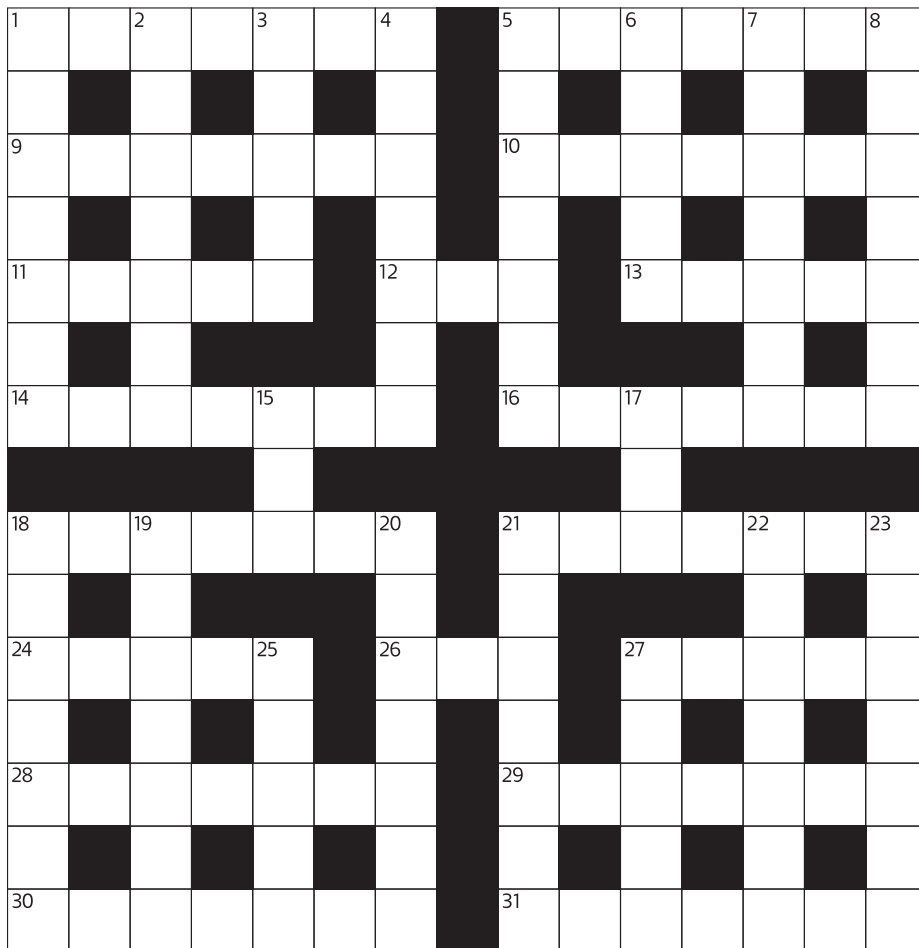
FRANK W. LEWIS

ACROSS

- 1 Pitch to the President? This might be just part of the overhead for some people. (7)
- 5 and 14 An overactive young feller who is both good at the lash, and with the finger and thumb. (14)
- 9 The end of Porky, but for certain Asians of yore it might hang on top. (3-4)
- 10 Do you have a need for such scrubbers? (The fool has, in a way.) (7)
- 12, 13, 11 and 24 Does the poem involve several letters having all the British coming in over there? (Husky types got around in this.) (3,5,2,3,5)
- 14 See 5
- 16 Just a little guy carrying a fishing rod, but might turn into a pretty good jumper. (7)
- 18 Not necessarily what happens when the wind blows for the baby in the treetop, but it's a firm foundation. (7)
- 21 We are told that there'll always be one, but it could be a little type with your tonsil, for instance. (7)
- 24 See 12
- 26 and 27 Bird that goes like a crazy one, with the nautical opening. (8)
- 28 A general idea of the writing rather than the demarcation that shows the ball has gone too far. (7)
- 29 It could be "Nuts!" to your friend in Paris, but at least gets a big wave! (7)
- 30 The people who go around tidying things up, or just what they might wear? (7)
- 31 Yes, to a Mediterranean, seats are not good for such naps! (7)

DOWN

- 1 Regarding it, poets show how a cautious mother comes in so as not to awaken the child. (7)
- 2 A lot of boats on show, which should be great at a display. (7)
- 3 The sign of acceptance with a wise man, but grammatically yours should be good. (5)
- 4 In common parlance, where the rod might go, but her lot's not the best! (7)
- 5 Descriptive of the dreams people say you can't have—"far out" (proving someone like Oscar can be found on a little street). (7)



- 6 Press club but not the singular type. (5)
- 7 Such treatment doesn't count, in position with Ms. Peep. (7)
- 8 Determination to do this puzzle all over again? (7)
- 15 In favor of the non-amateur type. (3)
- 17 and 27 One doesn't like to find oneself in Pluto's home, for instance. (8)
- 18 In which a junior version of a street criminal finds his youth. (7)
- 19 Either of the Indian states? It's all right to get up in the information, to a certain point. (7)
- 20 More than one 17-27 know the old-fashioned way how the hero of Trafalgar is not getting on so well. (7)
- 21 Is in Paris, getting a bad seat for what was general some time ago. (7)
- 22 What opposites are supposed to do near a large area of land. (7)
- 23 On getting up, what a boat might need to have in the past, just for such pretty things. (7)
- 25 One might consider it static when one is slightly crazy. (5)
- 27 See 17

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3089

L	O	N	G	S	U	F	F	E	R	I	N	G	
Y	N	E	N		L	E	O	B					
A	N	T	O	N	Y	M		A	D	V	E	R	S
H	H	E	O		G	O	T	A					
O	V	E	R	R	U	L	E	S		L	E	H	A
				A	D		H	U	P				
I	N	S	U	L	T		V	I	R	T	U	O	S
S	I	I		A	P		I	L	V				
M	A	G	A	Z	I	N	E		C	O	H	E	R
	H	A		A	P		N						
M	O	T	E	T		T	R	O	J	A	N	W	A
O	S			I	O		N		R	A			
P	R	E	F	O	R	M		C	R	I	N	G	E
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	C	R	I	S	S	C	R	O	S	S	I	N	G

How Did a Spacewalk Lead to Safer Sunglasses?

NASA-based research leads to new, safer sunglasses technology that virtually eliminates dangerous glare.



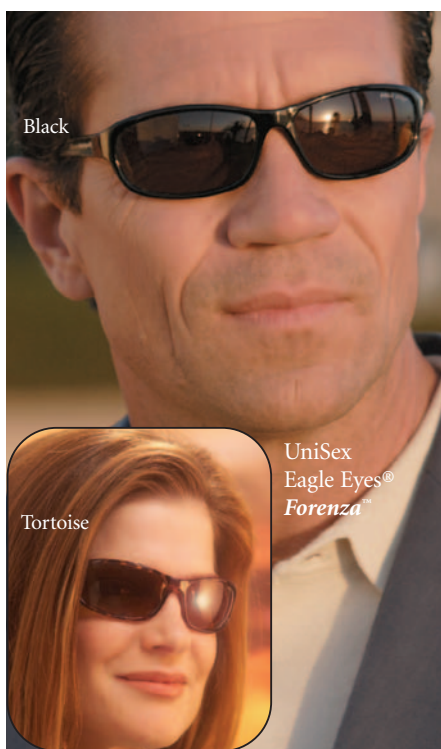
Developed from Original NASA Optic Technology, **EAGLE EYES®** is the **ONLY** Sunglass Lens Certified by the **SPACE FOUNDATION**

Drivers Alert: Driving can expose you to more dangerous glare than sitting on a sunny beach...do you know how to protect yourself?

Can sunglasses be much more than just a stylish fashion accessory? Well, these sunglasses may actually save your life. A stunning breakthrough in optical technology by NASA resulting in the Eagle Eyes® *Forenza™* can actually eliminate UV light and significantly reduce dangerous glare to improve your field of vision. It's always important to protect your eyes from the dangerous rays of the sun but when driving, glare reduction is crucial to your safety. You need to be able to see traffic and hazards even when the sun reflects directly into your windshield.

The sun rises and sets at peak travel periods, during the early morning and afternoon rush hours. Many drivers find themselves temporarily blinded as they are driving directly into the glare of the sun. Deadly accidents are regularly caused by such blinding glare. Danger can come from reflected light off of another vehicle, from the pavement, or any other reflective surface. Early morning frost or dew can exacerbate this situation. Yet, motorists struggle on despite being blinded by the sun's glare that causes countless accidents every year.

Beware of windshield glare! This glare-induced "blindness" is especially prevalent in the early morning or late in the afternoon, and is worsened by the extremely reflective qualities of other cars. Even your windshield can make matters worse since wax and oil buildup can increase reflected glare.



“As a board certified ophthalmologist, I recommend Eagle Eyes® to all my patients to protect and enhance their vision!” —Dr. Lyda D. Tymiak”



This unhealthy glare of the sun is damaging to the various layers of the eye. Road conditions may almost double the amount of harmful UV that you encounter. NASA had to overcome significant problems to protect astronaut's eyes when outside of our atmosphere. Without the atmosphere's protection, the eyes can truly be blinded by the light.

At NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, scientists looked to nature for a solution by studying the eyes of eagles, known for their extreme visual acuity. NASA's researchers studied how eagles can simultaneously distinguish their prey from their surroundings with utmost precision,

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